

EXPERIENCING PUBLIC RELATIONS



**Nine Women.
Nine Perspectives.**

**Experiencing
Public Relations:
Nine Women.
Nine Perspectives.**

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**Published in Nigeria by
Public Relations Women Foundation**

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ISBN: 978-978-788-730-1

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to every young Nigerian woman trying to find their feet in the Public Relations practice.

It is our hope that the experiences shared by our contributors will guide, teach and mentor you in those quiet moments when wonder if you are on the right track.

We wish you incredible success on this path you have chosen, and we look forward to your name being on pages on this book sometime soon, in the future.

Aknowledgments

To the Lord God Almighty, the first practitioner in the Public Relations practice who provided the template for impactful creativity. We acknowledge that without Him, the vision for this book and the tenacity to see it published would be non-existent.

We are particularly proud to acknowledge and appreciate the hard work and dedication of Praise Mimololuwa Idowu, a God-sent help. As the Digital Communications and Programs Executive for Nigerian Women in PR, she has spent the last ten months designing and implementing new and existing initiatives which have deepened our impact. Praise carried out extensive research to find our contributors, engaged them and followed up to ensure we have this publication today.

To the women who wrote the stories that make up this book: thank you. This was indeed a labour of love. In the midst of very demanding schedules, pressing deadlines and challenging economic realities, you have documented your story of professional growth. We are proud of your journey and thankful for the opportunity to share it with the world.

Finally, we specially acknowledge all the partners and sponsors that shared the burden of making the Experiencing 2024 Conference and publication launches a reality – thank you.



Introduction

Documentation is an essential parting in propagating the culture and reality of a people. As it is said, the narrator will always be a hero in their own story. In the history of Public Relations, not many books are available that shares the perspective of how Africans had adapted to the peculiarities of our region in delivering Public Relations services. Indeed, the attempt to adopt Western standards of practice has often been met with strong resistance. This book is thus an important project that contributes of the body of knowledge in Public Relations.

Where books on Public Relations practice from an African perspective are few and far between, industry materials authored by women PR professionals are like a needle in the haystack. With this publication therefore, we document the experiences of Nigerian Public Relations women practicing in countries of the world to share the impact and peculiar challenges women go through as they find their foot in a global profession.

“Why women,” many have asked. We do not tire in providing a data-backed response that draws attention to the critical role women have played in developing the Public Relations profession worldwide. Over 70% of entry level professionals in the Public Relations industry are women; that figure reduces as we progress up the ladder. While there are now an increasing number of women who take up senior management positions, not enough is written about Public Relations from a woman’s perspective.

This is not a peculiar challenge in the Public Relations profession. Society places peculiar restrictions on women that demands a peculiar kind of humility that silences her achievements. But we are determined to change that narrative.

With this project, we take off that particular burden for Public Relations women by using our platform to tell their stories.

Today, we complete another lap in this marathon race to document women in Public Relations. Dear Reader, this is mentorship at the flip of a page. By reading their stories, you forge a connection with each contributor that provides context to make real life engagement easier. So, I encourage you to reach out to our contributors, share with them what part of their stories resonated with you, and pursue a value-driven relationship that transcends the pages of this book.

Happy reading!

Tolulope 'Tolucomms' Olorundero

Public Relations Consultant & Founder
Nigerian Women in Public Relations
(Public Relations Women Foundation)

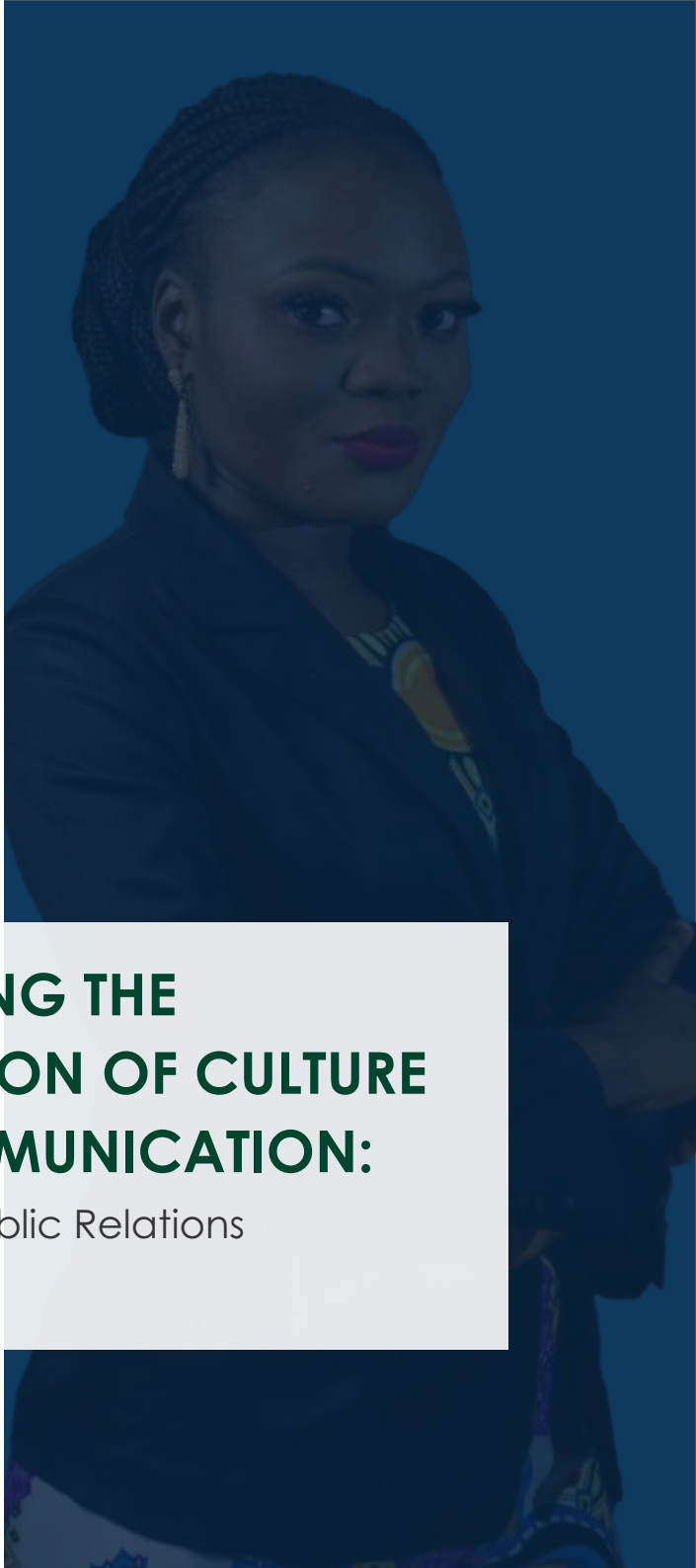
Chapter

01

NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION:

A Journey in Public Relations

By Adeola Aje 





CHAPTER ONE

NAVIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION:

A Journey in Public Relations

By Adeola Aje 

In the fast-paced realm of organisations, my journey has been a vibrant tapestry woven with diverse experiences and cultural nuances, shaping my unique perspective as a Nigerian woman navigating the dynamic field of Public relations. As I stand in the present, reflecting on the twists and turns that brought me here, I can't help but marvel at the evolution from where I am today to the beginning of my career.

Currently, I find myself at the forefront of the PR landscape, a seasoned professional who has weathered the challenges and embraced the ever-changing nature of the industry. My early days were marked by the role of a Public Relations Trainee at the Lagos Sports Commission, where the intricacies of sports PR became my initiation into the field.

From that starting point, I embarked on a journey through various agencies, each presenting a unique canvas of challenges and triumphs. Agencies like Precise Platforms Limited and Laura & Lloyd Communications became pivotal chapters in my story, allowing me to navigate the complexities of sectors such as technology, healthcare, and finance. It was during this phase that my commitment to excellence became a guiding force, propelling me to constantly learn, adapt, and refine my skills.

The true turning point in my career was my tenure at Precise Platforms Limited. This period served as a green field where I honed my skills and ventured into diverse industries. Managing PR strategies for clients like Henkel, Nestoil, OCP Africa, Amazon Energy, Heritage Bank, Seplat, Keystone Bank, and Aella App broadened my understanding of the multifaceted PR landscape. Notably, it was here that I delved into the world of event planning and execution, organizing press conferences, coordinating exhibitions, and managing media relations.

Before my time at Precise Platforms Limited, I had the opportunity to work with clients of Asian origin at Laura & Lloyd Communications. This hands-on experience in media and client relations opened a new chapter in my learning journey. Immersed in a cultural exchange, I expanded my awareness and gained insights into the nuances of Asian culture.

My journey took an international flavour when I was involved in strategic media exposure for Adebayo Adeleke in South Africa. This task not only broadened my horizons but also introduced me to the intricacies of different cultures and terrains beyond Nigeria. It underscored the importance of growing a relevant network, especially in scenarios involving crisis management, lobbying, and gatekeeping.



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As a PR professional, versatility cannot be overemphasized.

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A remarkable moment in my personal and professional growth unfolded during my participation in the Global Citizen Festival in Ghana. Contributing to such a globally significant event brought me closer to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This experience became a catalyst, significantly broadening my perspective on cross-cultural communication and collaboration.

Against the backdrop of these experiences, Bolaji Okugasa, a mentor, played a crucial role in my development, and Bukola Sawyerr of BukiHQ Media. Laura & Lloyd Communications under the leadership of

Laura Oloyede further enriched my knowledge and skills under the mentorship of industry veterans, providing me with a deeper understanding of the intricacies of PR.

Transitioning between industries, from indigenous oil and gas companies like Seplat to entertainment giants like Universal Music Group, tech, fintech, healthcare, etc demanded versatility. Adapting strategies and tactics to meet the distinct demands of each sector became a hallmark of my career. Whether promoting Grammy award-winning artists, leading customer satisfaction research, or managing external and government affairs, I leveraged my diverse experiences to drive success.

Understanding different cultures, perspectives, and audience consumption in various territories became imperative. Having worked across major regions in Africa, including Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, the United States, and the United Kingdom, I advocate for practitioners to travel and learn about the world around them. While staying on top of trends is essential, as a PR practitioner, I believe that your passport must always be in use. Another unconventional yet effective method I employ is watching movies and listening to podcasts from different regions. This seemingly odd practice has proven beneficial, as some of the strategies in boardrooms are inspired by scenes in movies.

As a PR professional, versatility cannot be overemphasized. Having worked across different sectors for the past six years, I consider myself a general practitioner. You must know a little above average about different industries, a principle instilled in me by my mentor Bolaji Okusaga, and it has always worked.

In today's fast-paced world where communication is constantly evolving and becoming increasingly complex, the role of organisations professionals has become more important than ever. As a Nigerian woman, I have faced unique challenges in navigating the intricacies of culture, communication, and commerce in the field of organisations. However, through resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to excellence, I have been able to overcome these challenges and make a positive impact in my field.

In comparing the operational dynamics of campaign execution in South Africa and Nigeria, a notable distinction emerges. One significant challenge encountered during the initiation of campaigns in South Africa was the protracted media response time, a departure from the swift and predictable feedback often experienced in Nigeria. In the latter, media pitches are typically met with prompt responses, be they affirmative or negative, contingent upon the client's significance, media prominence, or adherence to in-house rules.

Regrettably, the prolonged media response time in South Africa contributed to an unanticipated extension of the campaign duration, transforming what was initially intended as a month-long endeavor into a three-month protraction. This delay stemmed from the necessity to adapt strategies and navigate the nuances of the media landscape, underscoring the imperative of tailoring approaches to the distinct characteristics of each region.

Furthermore, the variances in audience preferences and content requirements between the two countries became apparent during the execution of campaigns. It became incumbent upon our team to address disparities and convey the message that the South African audience diverges significantly from its Nigerian counterpart. This heightened awareness prompted adjustments in content creation and strategic communication to align with the unique expectations of the South African demographic.

Noteworthy is the observation that, despite both countries falling within the African continent, the divergent consumption habits of their respective audiences necessitate a nuanced and region-specific approach. Nigeria's more expedient acceptance and favorable consumption habits, particularly evident in its vibrant music and entertainment industry, underscore the need for adaptability in organisations strategies.

In recounting my experience, I note that working with Usher Raymond in Ghana presented a more streamlined collaboration compared to the challenges faced in South Africa. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize that gender played no discernible role in the observed differences. Public relations, as a professional discipline, proved to be neutral to gender considerations, as I collaborated seamlessly and effectively with stakeholders in Ghana. The campaign's success in Ghana, marked by a receptive media environment and positive outcomes during the evaluation, further attests to the importance of recognizing and adapting to the unique characteristics of each locale in the pursuit of successful organisations endeavors. The principal is also a determinant in the response time of media.

Conversely, the United States presents a distinct challenge in terms of media penetration, particularly for clients and principals not domiciled within the country. Unlike the Nigerian media landscape, which is open and receptive to brands from diverse global origins, the media environment in the United States demands a heightened focus on relevance and significance.

The media in the United States exhibits a discerning and robust emphasis on the essence and value proposition of brands. Recognizing this, it is incumbent upon professionals in the field to adeptly craft narratives that establish relevance and visibility for international principals. Undoubtedly, the task becomes more manageable when representing a prominent client, as the inherent recognition and influence associated with such entities can facilitate a more favourable reception within the highly competitive and discerning U.S. media market.

In acknowledging the intricacies of media engagement in the United States, industry colleagues must concur with the need for strategic efforts to establish and amplify the presence of international clients. Collaborative endeavors aimed at navigating the challenges unique to the U.S. media landscape will be pivotal in achieving successful outcomes for clients seeking to gain traction and recognition in this dynamic market. As professionals, our collective commitment to adapting strategies and fostering meaningful connections is essential in overcoming the complexities inherent in media penetration within the United States.

Throughout my career, I have gained valuable experiences and insights that have shaped my approach to organisations. I believe that embracing diversity and harnessing creativity is key to success in this field, and I strive to inspire and empower the next generation of Public relations practitioners to do the same. My journey serves as a testament to the power of adaptability, cultural understanding, and an unwavering commitment to excellence in the pursuit of success in organisations.

The field of organisations is constantly changing and evolving. It takes a great deal of determination and passion to navigate this landscape successfully. I

take pride in the lasting impact I have made in this field and am dedicated to continuing my work with the same level of drive and dedication that has brought me to where I am today.

As we move towards an increasingly technologically driven world, there are debates about the extent to which technology will replace humans in PR. With the advent of AI and other advanced technologies, it is clear that machines can perform numerous tasks previously done by humans, such as analyzing data and generating reports. However, I firmly believe that the human perspective will always remain vital in communications and organisations.

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I believe that embracing diversity and harnessing creativity is key to success in this field.

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While AI can certainly enhance professionals' ability to measure, research, and tailor content, it cannot replace the human touch when it comes to building a brand's or an individual's reputation. For instance, while AI can help to identify the most effective keywords and phrases to use in a press release, it cannot understand the nuances of human language and tailor the content to different audiences, as humans can.

Moreover, PR is a field in which building and maintaining relationships with clients and stakeholders are crucial. While AI-powered chatbots can assist with customer service, they cannot replace the empathy and emotional intelligence that humans possess, which are essential for building trust and credibility.

In conclusion, while technology continues to advance and change the Public relations landscape, the human element will always be at the core of effective communication and reputation management. AI can certainly enhance Public relations professionals' abilities, but it cannot replace the human touch when it comes to building and maintaining relationships with clients and stakeholders.

Bio



Adeola Aje is a seasoned Communication Specialist with an impressive background in Public and Media Relations, Strategic Communication, content strategy development, research, writing, and stakeholder engagement. Graduating with a first-class BSc in Mass Communication from the National Open University and holding a Diploma in Mass Communication from Bayero University Kano, Adeola combines a strong educational foundation with extensive professional experience.

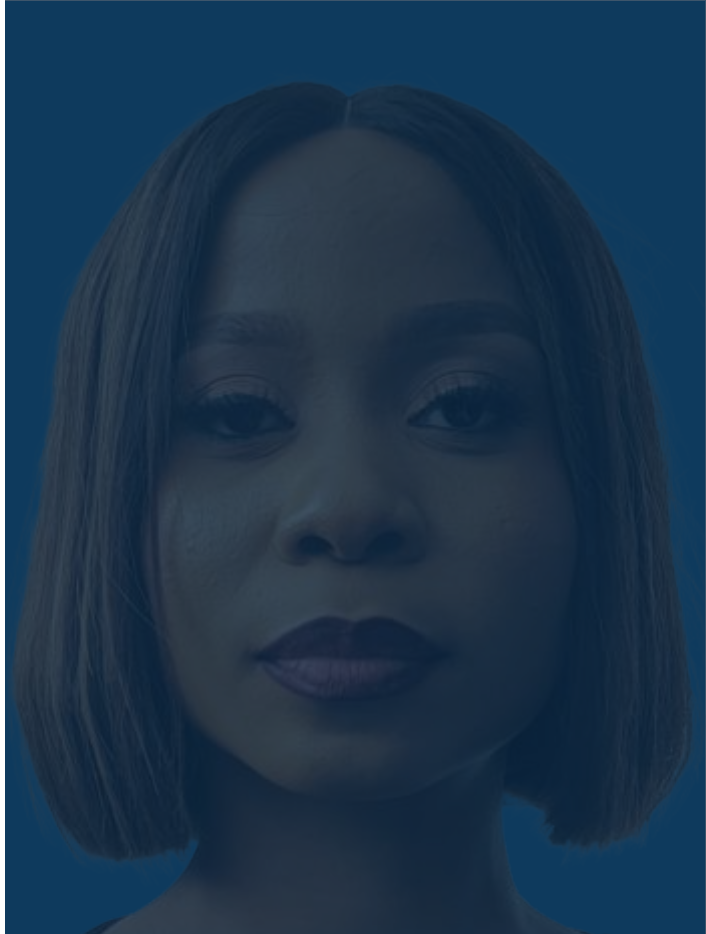
Throughout her career, she has demonstrated the ability to lead teams effectively in the Oil and Gas, Financial Services, and Entertainment sectors, collaborating with both public and private sector organisations. Noteworthy brands in Adeola's portfolio include Seplat, StarTimes, E-Transact, Nestoil, and OCP Africa. Beyond corporate communications, Adeola has played a pivotal role in the art and entertainment industry, managing strategic publicity and promotional campaigns for distinguished figures such as Grammy Award winner Burna Boy, Usher Raymond, and Quincy Jones Music productions.

In addition to being a Communication Specialist, Adeola excels as a Product Manager and Designer, showcasing a commitment to continuous personal and professional growth. With a focus on becoming a well-rounded leader, Adeola possesses strong people management, negotiation, and communication skills. The ability to adapt to changing environments, coupled with a creative mindset encapsulated by the mantra 'If you can think it, you can do it,' defines Adeola's professional approach.

Furthermore, Adeola is passionate about mental health, actively contributing to its improvement and awareness. This commitment reflects a broader goal of making a positive impact on society, not only through effective communication strategies but also through initiatives that support mental well-being.

Confident in the ability to contribute to the success of any project or organisation, Adeola eagerly anticipates opportunities to showcase expertise in communication planning and strategy development, product management, and design, while championing important causes such as mental health awareness.

Chapter
02



**PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A
GATEWAY TO ORGANISATIONAL
SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH**

By *Utibe Ekpuk* ■ ■



CHAPTER TWO

PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A GATEWAY TO ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

Utibe Ekpuk ■ ■

Introduction

In today's fast-paced and competitive business world, Public Relations (PR) plays a crucial role in ensuring business success. As the founder and PR specialist of Mebas PR, a private social enterprise that provides useful information to PR professionals worldwide, I have personally witnessed the transformative power of Public relation.

In this article, I will discuss the importance of PR careers and how they can lead to business sustainability and growth. Using Mebas PR as a case study, we'll explore the benefits of PR and its impact on business success.

How Does Public Relations Serve Other Industries?

The role of Public Relations (PR) in business is crucial and extends far beyond just managing media relations or handling crises. Its scope is much broader and includes strategic communication, reputation management, brand building, and stakeholder engagement. With the advent of the digital age and the rapid spread of information, businesses require the expertise of PR professionals who can navigate the complex landscape of traditional and digital media to create narratives that are compelling and resonate with their target audience.

Some Insights on Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

Public relations in Nigeria is a constantly evolving and dynamic field that is shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors. As a Nigerian woman working in PR, I have first-hand experience of the challenges and nuances of practising organisations in Nigeria. One of the significant challenges is the perception of Public relations as a secondary profession. It is often overshadowed by marketing and advertising. However, the importance of Public relations in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, both internal and external, is increasingly being recognized.

I currently serve in the technology and data industries, which are characterized by their fast-paced nature and constant innovation. In these industries, Public relations plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, managing reputation, and driving engagement. One of the peculiarities of these industries is the need for Public relations professionals to stay updated with the latest trends and developments, as technology and data are constantly evolving fields.

The Trajectory of our Industry over the Last-five Years

In the past five years, the path of Public relations careers in Nigeria has been both promising and challenging. The emergence of digital media and the increasing significance of reputation management have led to a considerable demand for skilled PR professionals.

However, many businesses in Nigeria have suffered due to the lack of a PR strategy or the employment of unskilled Public relations professionals.

A survey conducted by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) revealed that 30% of businesses that have experienced a decline in reputation or faced a crisis, attributed it to the absence of a robust Public relations strategy. Furthermore, another 20% of businesses attributed their challenges to the employment of unskilled Public relations professionals. These statistics highlight the critical role of PR in ensuring the success and sustainability of businesses in Nigeria.



Amplifying the Importance of Public Relations Careers

Despite the ever-increasing importance of our industry, Public relations careers are often overlooked or undervalued. Many young professionals are unaware of the diverse opportunities that a career in Communications and organisations can offer, from working with high-profile clients to shaping public perception and influencing decision-makers. It has become essential that more people recognize the value of Public relations careers and the impact they can have on business sustainability and growth.

This industry is not just about managing perceptions; it is about shaping narratives, building relationships, and driving brand success. As the Founder of Mebas PR, who serves her colleagues globally by providing access to information on recent opportunities in the industry, I dare say that PR careers play such a crucial role in shaping the world we live in and enabling businesses to thrive.

Public Relations as the Catalyst for Organisational Sustainability

Organisational sustainability is not limited to environmental conservation only, as many may think; it also involves making sure that a brand can survive and succeed in the long run. Public Relations (PR) is a crucial element in achieving this goal by helping businesses establish strong relationships with their stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors and the community. By effectively conveying their values, mission and accomplishments, businesses can improve their reputation and credibility, which are necessary for long-term success.

Women in the Nigerian Public Relations Industry

The organisations industry in Nigeria has seen a gradual increase in the number of women occupying key positions. However, there is still a significant gender gap that needs to be addressed. According to data from the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), only 35% of senior positions in PR agencies and corporate communications departments are held by women.

To address this gender gap, it is imperative to encourage more women to pursue careers in PR. Professional training and mentorship programs can play a crucial role in this regard, providing women with the skills, knowledge and

confidence needed to excel in the industry. By empowering more women to take up leadership roles in PR, the industry can benefit from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, ultimately driving innovation and growth.

Harnessing Self-Confidence in Carrying out Your Communications Duties as a Young Professional In client/agency communication roles, self-confidence is paramount for young professionals to effectively convey messages, inspire trust, and drive engagement. Here are practical actions and guidelines for harnessing self-confidence in both internal and external communications:

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Internal Communications:

Understand the Organization: Gain a deep understanding of the organisation's goals, values and culture to align internal messaging with its objectives.

Be Proactive: Take the initiative to communicate updates, changes and important information to employees in a timely manner.

Build Relationships: Develop strong relationships with key stakeholders, including senior management and department heads, to facilitate open and effective communication.

Be Clear and Concise: Communicate messages clearly and concisely, avoiding jargon or technical language that may be difficult for employees to understand.

Seek Feedback: Solicit feedback from employees to gauge the effectiveness of internal communications and make improvements where necessary.

External Communications:

Know Your Audience: Understand the target audience and tailor messages to resonate with their needs and interests.

Be Confident in Your Expertise: Trust your knowledge and expertise in the industry, and convey information with authority and clarity.

Be Authentic: Maintain authenticity in your communication, as genuine messages are more likely to resonate with the audience.

Listen Actively: Practice active listening to understand the needs and concerns of your audience, and respond accordingly.

Stay Positive: Maintain a positive attitude in your communication, even in challenging situations, to inspire confidence and trust in your audience.

The Case Study of Mebas PR: A Digital Opportunity Hub for Public Relations Professionals

Mebas PR is a great example of how organisations can lead to organisational growth and sustainability. The online hub was birthed with the vision of providing valuable information to PR professionals around the world. It has expanded rapidly and now serves over 400 professionals worldwide in less than a year. Through its platform, Public relations professionals can access the latest global industry news and opportunities, helping them stay ahead of the constantly changing industry.

Mebas PR's success can be attributed to its focus on inclusivity and diversity. By providing a platform that caters to PR professionals from diverse backgrounds and regions, Mebas PR has created a dynamic community where ideas are shared, collaborations are formed, and knowledge is exchanged. This not only benefits individual Public relations professionals but also contributes to the overall growth and advancement of the Public relations industry.

My Personal Journey in Public Relations

My journey in the field of organisations has been an enlightening and rewarding experience, which has been shaped by various milestones and experiences. I started my career in Public relations with a strong passion for communication and a desire to make a positive impact through storytelling. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work on several successful projects and campaigns, each offering valuable insights and lessons. One astoundingly successful project is the International Career Day organized by The Bridge Leadership Foundation (TBLF) in 2020, a year described as the Covid year; however, being the first time the event was held virtually, it recorded a huge success with 49,650 youths in participation.

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Public relations is ultimately about people, and establishing trust and credibility with clients, media and other stakeholders is crucial for success.

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One of the most significant milestones in my career was the founding of Mebas PR - a private social enterprise that is dedicated to providing access to useful information for PR professionals around the globe. Through Mebas PR, I have been able to connect with PR professionals from different parts of the world, which has given me a deeper understanding of the global PR landscape and expanded my network.

My Client Experience

In my years of experience, I have had the opportunity to work with a diverse range of clients, from startups to non-governmental organisations, government parastatals, and private brands. One notable project I worked on involved launching a new product in the technology industry. This project required strategic planning, media relations, and stakeholder engagement to generate buzz and drive sales, and in my first year working in the data and artificial intelligence field, my company gained the spotlight and was the only Nigerian company to be invited for the First Global AI Safety Summit organized by the UK government with very key global thought-leaders like Elon Musk and Ministers of States across the world. This speaks much of the power of storytelling in amplifying an organisation's vision and mission.

A key lesson I have learned from my experience is the importance of building and maintaining relationships. Public relations is ultimately about people, and establishing trust and credibility with clients, media and other stakeholders is crucial for success.

In conclusion, the organisations career trajectory in Nigeria is on an upward trend, driven by the increasing demand for skilled professionals. By harnessing self-confidence and empowering more women to pursue careers in Public relations, the industry can continue to grow and thrive, catalyzing organisational sustainability and growth.

Bio

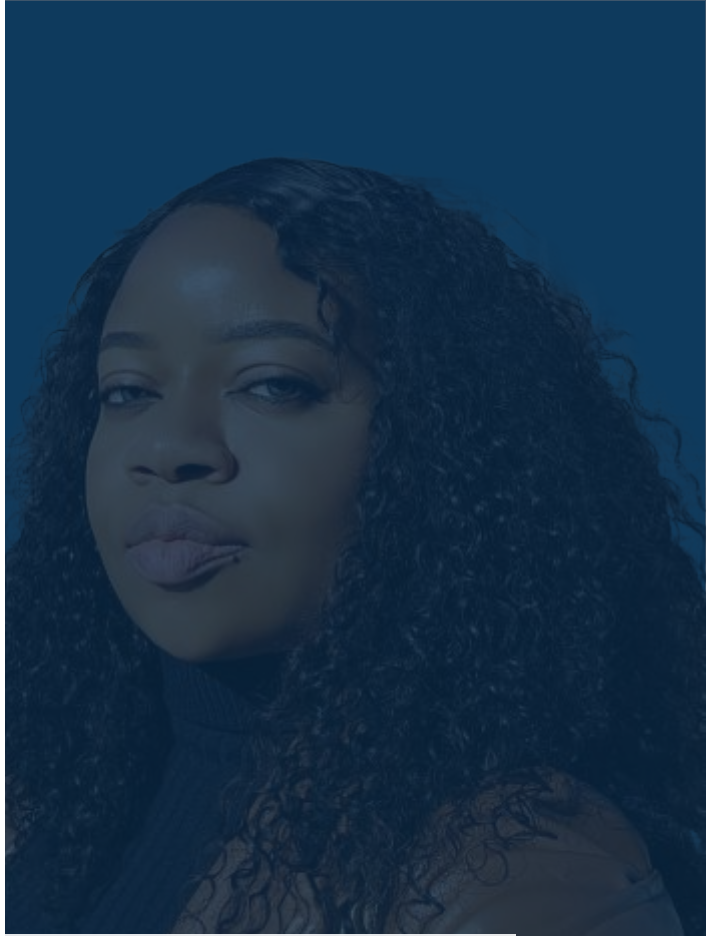


Utibe-Eno is a Communications and organisations professional with experience in brand management, digital marketing (Copywriting, SEO, SMM and Google Analytics, Email Marketing), media relations, and corporate event management.

As the Founder of Mebas PR, an opportunity hub for PR practitioners, she is committed to helping young practitioners and enthusiasts access information and opportunities for professional development with a vision to enable decent work and economic growth in Africa while increasing interest in PR careers.

She is keen on facilitating innovation for social good with love for conversations around the SDGs.

Chapter
03



THRIVE BEYOND BORDERS

PR and Communications Insights

Akunna Onyedum 



CHAPTER THREE

THRIVE BEYOND BORDERS

PR and Communications Insights

Akunna Onyedum 

Public Relations Career

My career as a Public Relations and Communications professional has been a healthy balance of growth, challenges, and unforgettable lessons.

I began practicing in 2009 as a corporate affairs officer for an engineering and renewable energy company in Lagos, Nigeria. It was a Nigerian company with partners in Germany, Switzerland, India, and China - and that was my first real exposure to cross-cultural communication outside Nigeria.

In 2015, I moved to a multinational pharmaceutical company where I oversaw Communications for the English West Africa region. Though I worked out of the Nigerian office, my daily responsibilities involved interacting with colleagues in various countries within and outside Africa. A significant milestone in this role was leading crisis communication for two major product recall incidents that happened back to back. We successfully contained both situations by strategically engaging our internal and external stakeholders including the media and regulatory authorities.

In 2020, I relocated to Canada where I first worked for the Government of Canada for a few years before moving to my current job in the tech industry.

My career in Canada has been largely shaped by the rich diversity of my work experience in Nigeria. Key learning throughout my career has been to always take advantage of the multifaceted nature of Public relations and Communications by deepening my work experience in its various aspects. This has kept me adaptable and able to tackle unexpected challenges.

Country of Practice

Navigating the Public relations and communications landscape in Canada as a foreign-trained professional is sometimes a challenge and other times a source of strength. Overall, it has been a transformative journey of unlearning, relearning, and a mindset shift, one that demands an understanding of the cultural and professional differences in the landscapes of Public relations in Nigeria and Canada. I'll share some of them below:

Audience composition: Tailoring communications to connect with diverse audiences while retaining the core messages reflects the delicate balance that is needed for effective communication. As culturally diverse as Nigeria is, I had adequate ethnic knowledge of my audience and stakeholders and I easily considered them when crafting messages or engaging with them. Also, everyone in Nigeria who speaks English has a uniform understanding of the language, with minimal risks of misinterpretation stemming from cultural differences. In Canada however, one of the most multicultural countries in the world, it's a more delicate dance. A typical audience or group of stakeholders would have people of various nationalities and this poses a higher risk of misinterpretation of the English language. Thankfully, my past experience working with international partners and colleagues back in Nigeria made me more sensitive to the cultural nuances in communication, and this has been a cornerstone of my progress so far.

Ethnic sensitivity: In Canada, inclusive communication is even more crucial due to the country's acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples and the historical injustices they faced. Canada places a premium on driving reconciliation with them and creating a society where they feel valued and

recognized. I am constantly reminded of this in my work. In contrast, while Nigeria boasts a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity, I remember that the acknowledgement of indigenous communities was not as prominent on a national scale and was not demanded from organisations and communication professionals.

Style of writing: In the Canadian communication landscape, adherence to the Canadian Press (CP) style of writing is a prevailing standard that emphasizes consistency and clarity across various media platforms. It also ensures that communication is easily understood by people of diverse ethnic origins from across the globe. In Nigeria, on the other hand, we accommodate more flexibility in the range of linguistic expressions used in communication. While there were established guidelines, the communication approach I used while working in Nigeria allowed a broader spectrum of linguistic creativity that resonated well with my audience and stakeholders, regardless of ethnic differences.

Media landscape: The differences in media landscapes between Nigeria and Canada have a profound influence on the strategies I applied for effective engagement. While both countries have witnessed the rise of digitalization, Nigeria has adopted online platforms as powerful tools for sharing news much more than Canada is doing. Social media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion in Nigeria. Canada, on the other hand, is more conservative in the transition to digital media. Here, it is used more as a tool to complement traditional media, not as a replacement to overshadow it.

While engaging the media in Nigeria, I needed to use different media outlets to maximize the reach of our awareness campaigns through traditional and digital methods. In Canada, that would not be necessary as each major media outlet has a good balance of both traditional and digital coverage.

Some other differences, such as the level of government interference in media activities, depth of investigative journalism, as well as funding available to media outlets, all influence the kind of strategies needed for effective media relations in both countries.

Bilingualism: Nearly one in five Canadians speak both English and French. The Government of Canada gives equal status to both languages and promotes them as the country's official languages. While it is not compulsory for a PR and communications professional to be fluent in both languages, it is definitely an asset. It is also a demonstration of inclusion if you present information to the general public in both languages. Nigeria, on the other hand, recognizes English alone as the national language. With fluency in English, a professional would hardly have any linguistic limitations in their career in Nigeria; however, in Canada, some jobs would not be available to them due to the demand for fluency in both English and French.



Regulatory frameworks: It is also important for PR practitioners to stay conscious of the differences in regulatory frameworks and policy implications between Nigeria and Canada across different sectors, as well as the varying degrees of enforcement and consistency in both countries. A good practice would be to stay informed about regulatory changes and strive for the highest professional standards that would align seamlessly with any legal and ethical considerations.

Industry Focus in PR

As a Public Relations and Communications professional working in the tech industry, I have gained insights that extend well beyond the conventional boundaries of my field and anything I have learned in the past. My experience has been as thrilling as it has been challenging. I'll share some of the most rewarding skills:

Flexibility: Your success is largely based on your level of agility. The tech industry is the most fast-paced industry I have ever worked in. The ability to switch priorities according to business needs, and navigate among projects of various scopes and contexts is an essential skill to have.

Technical writing and tech speak: The tech industry is a language unto itself. Having worked in an engineering company in the past, I developed the skill of translating intricate technical jargon into digestible narratives for non-tech audiences. My daily work involves bridging the gap between tech professionals and the wider audience without diluting the essence of the messaging.

Curiosity and self-learning: Most tech professionals talk about their projects using tech speak that may be hard to understand. I learned to ask questions without any apprehension. It is essential that you understand technical concepts in their simplest form before you attempt to craft the key messages in your communication. This saves time and effort during the

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*Your success
is largely based
on your
level of agility.*

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Maintaining brand integrity amidst the digital flood should remain a priority.

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review process. In addition to demonstrating curiosity by engaging tech professionals, it is helpful to engage in self-learning to achieve an adequate understanding of the numerous but relevant backend technology platforms you would likely encounter in the course of your work.

Speed of innovation: Innovation in the tech industry is swift and relentless. PR and communications professionals in this space need to adapt to the accelerated pace of change. My goal is to always stay ahead of the curve by proactively thinking of ways to communicate the latest tech advancements or transformative projects. A good practice is to develop communication strategies that match the dynamic nature of the industry.

Crisis management: Being prepared for potential crises is imperative in the tech domain where data breaches, cybersecurity threats, and service disruptions are very common. Public relations and Communications professionals play a critical role in managing crises and maintaining their organisation's trust and credibility through it all. Similar to other sectors I've worked in, having a robust crisis communication and response plan helps to minimize the impact of crises and ensure business continuity.

Brand management: It can get so overwhelming dealing with the fast pace, innovation, and complexity of the tech industry that PR and communications professionals easily forget their original commitment to managing the corporate brand for their organisations. Maintaining brand integrity amidst the digital flood should remain a priority. I find that there is a delicate balance between communicating the hype that comes with technology and maintaining a realistic narrative that conveys both authenticity and the desired enthusiasm. This is necessary for maintaining a good image for the organisation.

Client/Agency Experience

Working as a Public relations and Communications professional on the client side in Canada has provided me with insights that underscore the country's dynamic business landscape and cultural nuances. Below are some best practices:

Strategic alignment with Canadian values: It is common practice in Canada to tailor Public relations and communication strategies to Canadian values. For example, Canadians value diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and are sensitive to environmental and social issues. They hold companies accountable for giving back to the community and they appreciate open authentic communication. It is thus important to incorporate the values of diversity, corporate responsibility, and transparency in Public relations and communication planning. It is also beneficial to promote sustainability initiatives and highlight the social impact of corporate activities.

Values-based partnerships: All over the world, companies engage in partnerships to achieve mutual organisations goals and piggyback on each other's advantages in the industry. While this practice is not unique to the Canadian business ecosystem, it is important to note that partnering with organisations that demonstrate the Canadian values I mentioned in my first point is crucial to the success of a PR campaign.

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It is thus important to incorporate the values of diversity, corporate responsibility, and transparency in Public relations and communication planning.

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Seasonal considerations: Canada's seasons affect the nature and timing of Public relations and Communication campaigns. Event management, product launches, and crisis management would have different outcomes based on the time of the year they take place. Adapting Public relations and Communications strategies to align with the seasons helps you to keep your projects and campaigns relevant and resonate better with your audience and stakeholders.

Crisis management in the digital realm: According to Statistics Canada in 2023, nearly 95% of Canadians had access to the internet. This makes social media the first channel of communication for impacted individuals when a crisis occurs, putting the reputation of the companies involved at stake. To manage this, it is important to understand how quickly an issue can escalate as soon as it gets to the internet, and incorporate the relevant strategies in your risk mitigation, crisis response, and communication plan.

Recognition of Indigenous perspectives: Acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous voices is a unique element in Public relations and Communication planning in Canada. Doing this as often as possible reflects your awareness and commitment to the country's ongoing efforts towards reconciliation with Indigenous communities across the country. It also aligns with the Canadian value of inclusion by recognizing the importance of Indigenous contributions.

This reflection on my career journey has highlighted the most outstanding dimensions that continue to shape my experience as a Nigerian professional in Canada. My hope is that it serves as a guide to PR and communications professionals intending to practice in Canada and other countries with a similar cultural and professional landscape.



Bio

Akunna Onyedum is a Corporate Communications professional who has spent the last 15 years honing her craft across various private and public sector organisations, including a Fortune 500 company. She has demonstrated expertise and excelled in the implementation of strategic PR and communication initiatives in industries ranging from hydroengineering and renewable energy to healthcare and technology.

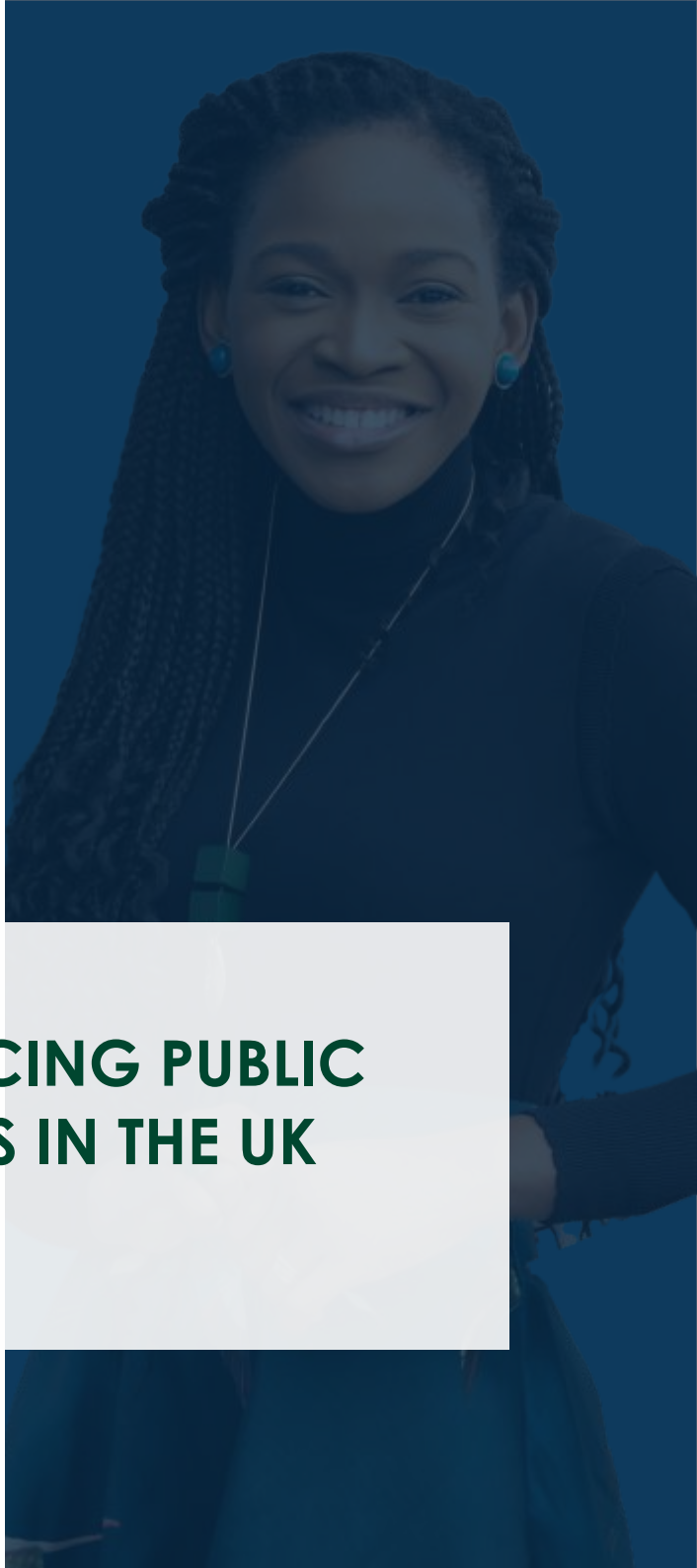
Akunna brings a unique perspective to her role owing to her diverse experience across various fields in Nigeria as well as in Canada where she is now based.

She enjoys helping organisations achieve their goals using PR and Communications as a strategic tool. When she's not doing this, she's busy traveling the world, hiking the Canadian Rockies, playing Scrabble or exploring the outdoors with family and friends.

Chapter
04

**EXPERIENCING PUBLIC
RELATIONS IN THE UK**

Eduvie Martin 





CHAPTER FOUR

EXPERIENCING PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UK

Eduvie Martin 

Introduction

I am writing this piece from my home in London at a time when many Nigerians are leaving Nigeria for other parts of the world. Japa! That's what we are calling it – a word from the Yoruba dialect spoken by some Nigerians loosely meaning 'to escape' or 'to quickly move away from a situation that is not working'.

In the wave of the economic downturn, many highly skilled Nigerians left very successful careers to further their education or to start their careers from scratch in a strange land. They did this so they could provide more opportunities for their loved ones in what they saw as a more stable environment.

My PR career in the UK was not necessitated by what is now known as the 'Japa syndrome' though it happened at roughly the same time. This piece however is dedicated to Public relations practitioners in new cities under such nuances. And if this serves as your reminder that though you count yourself lucky to be experiencing a new city with new opportunities, you can still thrive in Public relations, then my work here is done.

I received the offer to start my PR career in London in 2019. I could hardly believe it as I listened to the voice of my future boss on the phone offering me the position of Group Internal Comms Manager working with three Management Board members.

I flew into the city, business class, airport lounge, Michelle Obama's book in my palm though I could hardly read the words through my glistened eyes. Moving to London was easy and though I did not have a crowd of people waiting for me at the airport and sirens to accompany me as the VIP I thought I was; I had my flights paid for, accommodation provided, the family sought after, and was ushered into the arms of a highly effective team. The best way to move to another city is through your current organisation. If this is your dream, find a company with a global footprint, work your way up, and make your intentions known.

In my first week in the UK, I was wide awake to the different nuances and filled with trepidation at how much I had to learn, fast. I quickly understood why one should have the meeting before the meeting, have watercooler chats, spend time with colleagues in informal settings, and join communities.



Now in my 5th year, I will share 5 lessons that have stuck with me as I navigated a PR career here in the UK.

Stay curious: Starting a career in a new city reveals how much more you need to learn. Yes, I know you were awesome back home, you were the head of your department, and the best-graduating student ... the truth is, most of us were. Stay humble, and soak up new learnings, only then can you really thrive in a new city.

Do it well: I truly believe that whatever your hand finds to do, you must do well. I started my PR career volunteering for everything, telemarketing, carrying the banners, assembling the sales point, building intranets, writing articles and I watched as I was given more responsibilities as I proved myself in the small tasks. As you navigate a new career in a new city, let me reiterate point 1, stay curious, stay humble but most importantly do even the smallest things well. You may find yourself doing work that your interns did for you back home, stay focused.

Never forget your why: There will be hard days, you will miss the familiar, curse the weather, crave some home food and the comfort of friends; you will wonder if you made the right decision to leave a thriving career behind. Don't let this distract you. Always remember your 'why' and let this centre you in all situations.

Diversify your network: It is easy to find people who look and think just like you and can confirm situations in a way that will appeal to you but be mindful to avoid confirmation bias. Just because people are experiencing a particular situation in a certain way doesn't mean that your experience will be similar. Yes, the stats allude to a bleak outlook when it comes to the PR industry in some instances. Access your situation and adjust based on what you are experiencing, not what you've been told you will experience. I always give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

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The best way to move to another city is through your current organisation.

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You are in control: Holding on to those sponsored/student visas can sometimes prevent you from doing what you must. Remember, real growth is measured not by your lateral moves in an organisation or by what everyone else is doing on LinkedIn but by what you were able to do with what life threw at you. You are responsible for your choices and your legacy. Choose to use your time wisely.

Armed with these 5 points, you are well on your way to thriving as a Public relations professional in a new city. I'll share a bit of my experience so it's not just some motivational points on a page.

My earliest memory of my love for Public relations was way back when I was 5, jiggling my little waist to the tunes of Fela coming from our home TV. My parents told me I loved television so much that I wanted to be in it. They tell tales of my love for the microphone so much so that I'd be performing music or hosting an event right from an early age. Then, I got to my teens, and very much to the confusion of my parents who were convinced I was born to do Public relations; I chose to study a science degree.

Born into a family of 4 medical doctors and a nurse, I was very much convinced that smart girls read science degrees. Such was the perception of the Public relations industry when I was in my developmental stages. Something to be done as a hobby, nothing to make a career of... I was deep into my science

degree when I realised that I truly wanted a career in Public relations. I would like to think of myself as a passionate, resilient person but I was not about to start university again with just one year to go. So, I finished my science degree with very good grades and never looked back at it.

Thanks to opportunities available to young graduates in Nigeria at the time, I applied to several graduate schemes so I could land a job to save up the funds I needed to upskill myself to start a role in Public relations.

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*You are responsible
for your choices
and your legacy.
Choose to use
your time wisely.*

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I got my big break in Banking as the youngest graduate recruit at the time, a feat recognised by the CEO. After a year on my graduate trainee rotation counting cash, delivering customer service, and organising events in the branch that no one asked for, I was introduced into the world of Public Relations by the new Head of Marketing and Communications who took one look at me and said you'll be good at Internal Communications. "Okay", I said as I did a quick Google search - I had no idea what Internal Communications meant.

As the pioneer Internal Comms hire at the time, I became responsible for creating some of the processes we would use to govern the effectiveness of comms at the bank. I had to turn my passion into skill. I would go on to get a master's degree in communications from the IE Business School in Madrid and several comms degrees from the New York Film Academy, London Business School, Ghana School of Journalism, and the Lagos Business School to deliver on my multiple roles in the course of seven years.

My proudest in-house career moment was when I created an internal news channel using employees as journalists and anchors to increase the read rates on emails. I was always empowered throughout my career journey by women who believed in me. I believe that the statement 'women don't support women' is a myth, good people empower people. Almost 20 years on, I remain a strong advocate for giving a passionate colleague a chance to thrive. This is why I am always open to a chat with Public relations professionals looking for someone who can share experiences to shape their career journeys. If this is you, here is your invitation to send me a direct message on LinkedIn. I am always rooting for you.

My experience as an in-house PR professional in the UK has been a pleasant one. I reached out through LinkedIn to people I admired and discovered how eager they were to help – often giving out free resources when asked, hoping on a call to share experiences, and meeting for coffee to tackle a business challenge. I was blown away by how freely those I reached out to were willing to give their time and resources. I became committed to paying it all forward.

To do this, I chose communities. First, I volunteered to serve on the board of the International Association of Business Communications (IABC) where I started out sharing my career journey to a room full of comms enthusiasts. Following that experience, I was invited to multiple speaking opportunities and received multiple job offers. Seeing the impact my story had on others fuelled me to keep sharing and further invest my time in communities. Three years on, I was nominated President-Elect of the IABC and extended my time to volunteer with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations where I have been involved in planning events including leading the CIPR Inside Summit, the first virtual internal comms conference post-pandemic. Experiencing PR in the UK is different for everyone; choosing communities and reaching out to others when you need help should form your perceptions of what it's like to thrive away from home.

If moving to another city is something you aspire to, those who have done it may seem fortunate, but it is not an easy path. I hope that my story encourages you to prioritise impact as you navigate your way towards a successful PR career path away from home.

Bio



Eduvie has almost 20 years of international experience in communications across multiple sectors including Banking, FMCGs, and start-ups. She studied Broadcast Journalism at the New York Film Academy and holds a Master's degree from the IE Business School, Madrid as well as certificates from the London Business School and PR Academy.

She is the Group Internal Communications Manager at BAT and Executive Director of Africa's largest publisher of independent comic books- Comic Republic – a start-up known globally for authentic stories and illustrations of African superheroes inspired by culture. She is known for attracting global media visibility to her comic book start-up which has done multiple client work for the BBC, Meta, and has clinched a major movie deal with Universal Studios Group.

She is a prolific speaker often hosting events, TV shows, and podcasts and influencing comms professionals at all levels to deliver work that adds value.

Eduvie serves as President-elect on the board of the International Association of Business Communications, is a member of the Institute Of Internal Communications and serves as a volunteer with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations where she is a Chartered practitioner.

In 2023, she was awarded a place on The Xec. leadership scheme, the first for UK-based Black, Asian, Mixed Race and Ethnic Minority (BME) PR and comms pros designed to create the next generation of BME leaders and to increase boardroom diversity, named PR woman of the month by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, nominated for a Comms Hero Dare to Fail Award for her contribution to the industry and a recipient of Simplys award for Best Internal Comms Rising Star.

She lights up at an opportunity to volunteer her time to advance the comms profession and to any afro beat that allows her dance to an empty room while organising her home.

Chapter
05



**ACCOUNT OF CORPORATE
PUBLIC RELATIONS
PRACTICE IN THE NIGERIAN
PUBLIC SECTOR**

Dr. Saudat Salah Abdulbaqi (fnipr) 



CHAPTER FIVE

ACCOUNT OF CORPORATE PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

Dr. Saudat Salah Abdulbaqi (fnipr) ■ ■

BACKGROUND

My love for Public Relations (PR) practice led me to study Mass Communication at Bayero University Kano in 1988. The discovery of the inherent persuasive skills in me started immediately after my secondary education when I became a regular choice for programme anchoring by my peers. My associates also noticed my technical skills in explaining complex issues to the understanding and conviction of others and made me an unelected group spokesperson. This experience ran through my university days, and beyond. My delight knew no bounds when I got to practice Public relations officially and as a means of livelihood.

PUBLIC RELATIONS CAREER

My career in Public relations started in 1995, when I was employed by the Management of the Nigerian Paper Mill Ltd, (NPM), Jebba as a Public Relations Officer (PRO), at a time when the industry was plagued by crises. I was the most junior officer in the unit, with a Public Affairs Manager (PAM), a very humane

lady, and a Senior Public Relations Officer (SPRO), a very hard-working elderly man who understood the factory and its politics like the back of his palm. As fate would have it, the PAM secured another job while we lost the SPRO to death. Thus, the business of running the unit fell solely on me, a wife, an expectant mother with a son! At that time, there were many issues to contend with: The government stopped the release of subvention to industries and the company had to rely on IGRs; prices of raw materials skyrocketed due to an increase in exchange rate (Iwuagwu, 2009), IGR became insufficient, and the Federal Government did not give a bale out, despite several desperate representations.

As a result, the Company could not pay salaries to its over 2500 staff, comprising engineers, marketers, agriculturists, administrators, and other ancillary workers who became unsure of their means of livelihood. Parents were not able to discharge their responsibilities, the unions became agitated and issues of power play waded in.

The economy of Jebba town, the host community, began to suffer because the existence of the town depended on the company. Amidst it all, the Public Relations Unit was faced with the challenges of sustaining mutual understanding between the aggrieved staff and the helpless management.

Although the myriad of crises were enough to break my tender shoulder, my positive disposition to live, strong interpersonal skills, ability to think through and act on complex issues and good media relations saw me through, each of which shall be briefly explained in this discourse.

Positive disposition to live: My faith as a Muslim, coupled with my background as a student of Islamic studies boosts my can-do spirit. I draw immense strength from Qur'an chapter three verse 159 which reads in part '... Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah, for Allah loves those who put their

trust in Him' (Ali, 1999). My schedule, as the only officer in the unit, involved regular shuttle between the location of the industry in Jebba, Kwara State, and Abuja, the base of the supervising ministry, Ministry of Industry. The journeys were a bit easier for me to embark upon when my official vehicle was roadworthy.

However, the situation degenerated when the car became grounded due to lack of maintenance. To discharge my liaising responsibilities with the supervisory ministry on behalf of my company, I had to rely on public transportation or free rides from Jebba to Abuja some of the time.

I recall a particular incident when I had to make an urgent trip to Abuja. The signal arrived at about 3.00 p.m, the accompanying documents were ready by 4.00 p.m and I had to leave immediately, despite being gravida. I still nurse a nostalgic reminiscence of the mood of my Managing Director (MD) when giving me the directive. My MD, the late Dr. Hussain Abdulkareem, was an Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering at the University of Lagos, a true patriot who strove with his might and means to make the indigenisation policy



of the Federal Government work, with NPM Jebba as a litmus test. Immediately after the document was ready, I took to the toll gate located at the northern axis of the River Niger bridge and I was lucky to be given a ride at around 6.30 p.m by the then Chief Press Secretary to the Kwara State Government, Mallam Nurudeen Abdulraheem who was also on an official mission to Abuja.

Such is the risk that passion for Public relations entails, but being positive makes the challenges surmountable.

Strong interpersonal skills: the office of the PRO is expected to be open and accommodating. It should be a leveller which gives everyone a sense of belonging, regardless of their social standing in the organisation.

Such was the ambience that my office provided. Whoever came there had a place for reading newspapers, gists, gratification, bantering, and gifts; be it as ordinary as a pack of envelopes. The reward for the warmth received from the office of the PRO came in the form of obtaining first-hand information from the rank and file, through rumour and the grapevine. This availed me the opportunity to be proactive and be on top of situations, most of the time.

Fraternity: I go to sit with my colleagues at the Senior Staff Club and I dedicate a Clerical Officer to do the same at the Junior Staff Club to gauge the feelings of

the workers in anticipation of their reactions to the ongoing financial difficulties. This strategy gave a sense of identification with others during those difficult periods and further strengthened their level of tolerance.

Thus, rekindling, to some extent, the disappearing public trust in the staff of the department as an extension of management.

Risk assessment for proactive planning: I interpreted roadside information and visualised its possible consequences in relation to safety levels when salaries owed were running for several months. Though also

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Thus, rekindling, to some extent, the disappearing public trust in the staff of the department as an extension of management.

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affected, I needed to evolve plausible communication strategies to promote the spirit of we-are-in this-together. My ability to take risks saved my general manager from the danger of a stampede in 1995, when a bomb went off at the Ilorin Township Stadium, the venue of the launching of the Kwara State chapter of the Family Support Programme (FSP). Some innocent school children lost their lives.

Ability to think through and act on complex issues: access to first-hand information availed me the opportunity to know the thinking of both internal and external publics of my organisation as well as predict the consequences of their actions and inactions. My interactions with them enlisted mutual trust and they found a confidant in me. My practical knowledge of the Mexican definition of Public relations as: 'the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation's leaders as well as implementing a planned programme of action which serves interest of both the organisation and its publics' was always alive in my mind.

Community relation: I held meetings with members of the community who are equally critical stakeholders. They formed themselves into interest groups and made their representations to the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Industry. As the spokesperson of the Company, the onus lies on me to ensure that the community is in tune with developments about the company.

Media relation: Maintaining a good relationship with media personnel is a prerequisite for effective organisations practice. I enjoyed tremendous support from the gentlemen of the press. They always had my back and the interest of my organisation was always foremost in their considerations when handling issues that related to the Nigerian Paper Mill, Jebba. My engagement of backdoor channels was also of great advantage.

COUNTRY OF PRACTICE:

I practice organisations in Nigeria. Some of my observed challenges during my practice at the NPM, Jebba include:

Non-recognition of Public Relations as a Management Function: Although the Public relations department enjoyed a central position in the activities of the Mill, the potency of its description as being a "management function" was reduced by its not being on the board of management. The fact that it had to route its communication with the management through the Company Secretary stalled the opportunity of giving the MD first-hand information requiring immediate actions, even in the heat of crises.

Visibility: the company enjoyed poor visibility as the various signposts mounted at different locations were neither big enough, descriptive nor well maintained. One would have expected an imposing billboard at the entrance to the Paper Mill Road from the Ilorin-Kaduna highway rather than the small one that was dwarfed by others of less importance. The Guest House signposts were also small and often covered by tall grasses on the roadside. The company rarely buys spots on radio or television except when there are visitors to the Mill. Hence, the publicity outlets of the company were inadequate, considering its dominant position in West Africa.

Communication strategy: The head of the Public relations unit was not vested with enough authority to speak on behalf of the company, and respond to media enquiries, especially during crises, without recourse to the MD who in turn must seek approval from the Hon. Minister of Industry before granting any interview. This could be counterproductive in crisis management as things might have gotten out of hand before the necessary approval was obtained.

Loss of trust: one of the criteria for effective Public relations practice is public trust. The staff of the Public relations department of the Nigerian Paper Mill Ltd. Jebba, lost this credibility in the event of the company's inability to pay salaries. The public, especially members of staff, were always predictive of what 'Madam PRO' would say when asked for an update about salary issues.

INDUSTRY FOCUS IN PR

I am currently in academics; teaching and mentoring Public relations practitioners. I also consult for public office holders and some Non-governmental Organisations (NGO).

Teaching Public relations with practical experiences makes it real and very interesting. My ability to illustrate my points with cases from my archives enriches the teaching and learning process. I also generate and present hypothetical problems to my students, we brainstorm in search of solutions together and at the end of the day, we all feel fulfilled with the outcome of the exercise.

In my consultancy engagements, I research issues to ensure value-laden symmetric communication.

CLIENT/AGENCY EXPERIENCE

Exhibitions: my department, in conjunction with the Marketing and Production Departments, exhibited the Company's products at local and International Trade Fairs. This was to showcase the activities of the company and to educate visitors on our stand on raw materials used and the process of paper production. Since NPM relied on locally sourced raw materials like bamboo, gmelina trees, pine, and waste paper. Trade Fair events were used to woo prospective suppliers to establish business engagements with the company. It is on record that we won an award at an International Trade Fair held in Dakar, Senegal in 1995 for the production of excellent quality paper from locally sourced raw materials.

I strive to make a clear distinction between organisations practice and propaganda. I adhere to the philosophy that the public deserves to know, and must be fed with truth. I advocate balanced information where all sides are treated with fairness, justice, and equity.

A public officer sought my opinion on how to respond to some defamatory allegations that were making waves against his person. My advice was for him to go public with his side of the story, leverage influencers in the community, and lay everything bare to them. The strategies worked. So, rather than hoarding the truth and not wanting to cause any ripple, the release of facts to the public enables them to draw informed conclusions.

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Bio



Dr. Saudat Salah Abdulbaqi teaches Mass Communication at the University of Ilorin where she served as Head of the Department from August 2015 to August 2018.

She is an alumnae of Bayero University Kano, University of Lagos, and Univeriti Utara Malaysia from where she obtained a B.A. Mass Communication, M.Sc. Mass Communication, and Ph.D. Communication respectively.

Dr. Saudat has cognate experience in the practical and theoretical worlds of communication having worked as a Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Paper Mills, Jebba, Senior Programme Producer at the Kwara State Television Authority, Ilorin, and a regular on-air personality on Radio Kwara, Gerin FM, Nigerian Television Authority, Ilorin and a host of others.

She has over fifty publications to her name in local, national, and international publication outlets with specialisation in Persuasive Communication, Public Relations, Advertising, Gender Communication, and Media Studies.

She is a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), and is currently a member of its Council after serving, meritoriously, as the Chairman of the KWARA State Chapter of the Institute. She is an Associate of the Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and many other professional bodies.

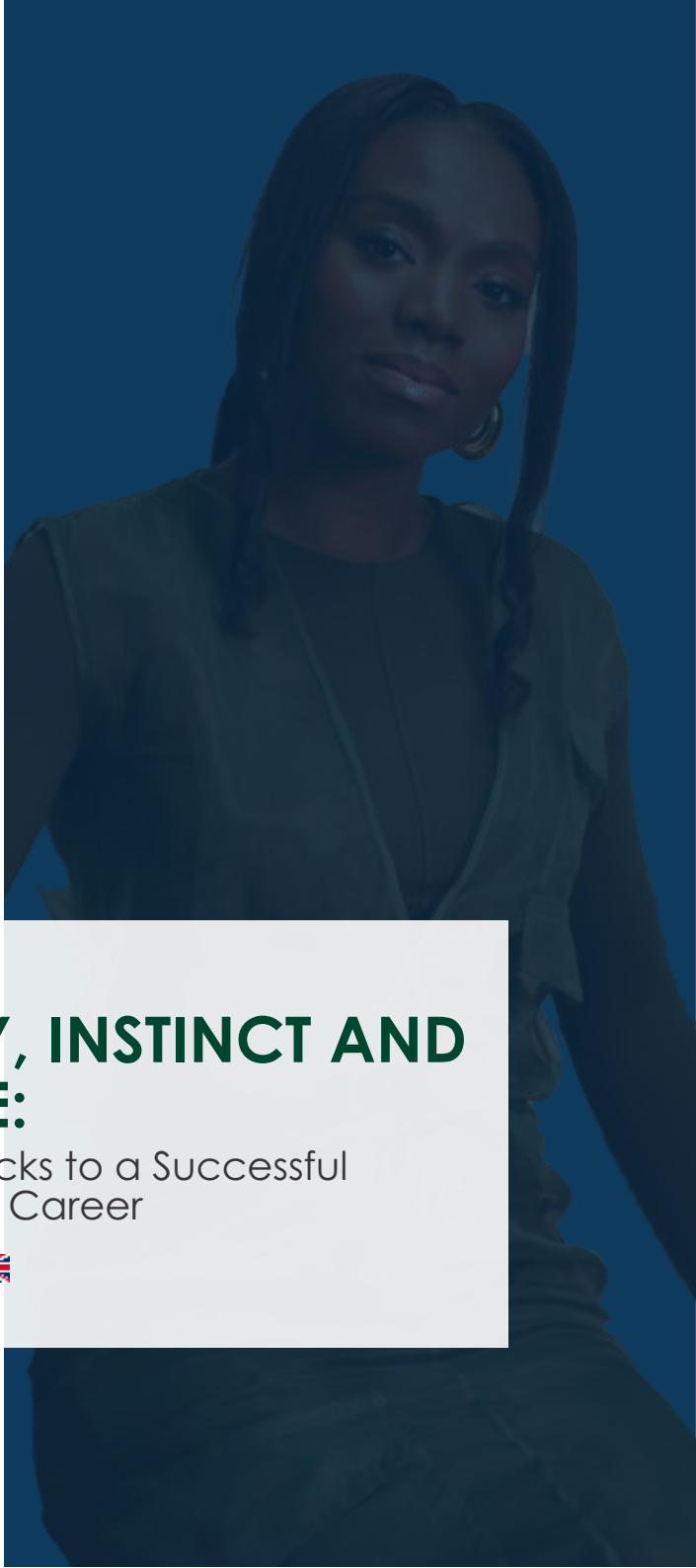
Dr. Saudat has been recommended for appointment as a Professor of Mass Communication, University of Ilorin. The recommendation is awaiting the Council's approval.

Chapter
06

**CURIOSITY, INSTINCT AND
COURAGE:**

The Building Blocks to a Successful
Public Relations Career

Deborah Olubiyi 





CHAPTER SIX

CURIOSITY, INSTINCT AND COURAGE:

The building blocks to a successful
Public Relations Career

Deborah Olubiyi 

Introduction

I never intended to pursue a path in organisations or the media. Influenced by my parents who both worked in the public health and social care sector, I originally had my sights set on a career in international development. I studied Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London and became passionate about work that focused on tackling the social determinants that impact health and well-being, i.e. economic stability, access to quality education, and universal health coverage. However, after graduation and following several rejections from jobs in the development sector, I had to pivot and find alternative ways to channel the energy I had to positively impact society. I found that throughout several internship opportunities I secured at well-known social impact organisations whilst studying at university - I became frustrated by the amount of bureaucracy that stood between discussions in board meetings to seeing tangible impact. I realised that there must be more effective tools to bring about change. This is where (unexpectedly) the media became a key part of my career journey.

The search to channel my energy for social good landed me on a national UK television programme on BBC Two called 'The Big Hospital Experiment'. This was a four-part documentary series that followed the journey of 14 young

volunteers who participated in a social experiment to test whether an official program of young healthcare volunteers could be a solution to alleviate the NHS staff crisis burden. I learned a lot from that experience, but the biggest takeaway was about the power of the media as a means to highlight issues and bring about change. When I compared the pace of change in the development world to the impact I saw from the documentary, I was surprised that an industry that felt so far removed from social impact was the biggest driving force in actually bringing about impact. That stuck with me.

After the documentary, I went on to work as a Personal Assistant for an influential religious leader in the UK, and then in a project management role at The Houses of Parliament. I am a big advocate of exploring and trying various career options until you find the one that sticks. We live in a world full of boxes and confinements, and if you're not careful, projected opinions and perceived limitations can become self-limiting beliefs that can stop you from achieving great things.



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In the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics 2021 census report, there are over 119,000 media professionals across Public relations and journalism.

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What specifically drew me into Public relations and Communications was simply curiosity. I was working at the Houses of Parliament and the main headlines of the day in the UK at the time were around a high-profile couple that took the British media by storm. Watching headline after headline, I started to develop a more critical eye into how the narratives around the couple were being developed and spun in several different directions. I became curious about wanting to understand the layers behind the clickbait I saw on social media and tabloid press. I eventually bought a book about the couple that was published at the time

and read through it with a fine tooth comb. I assessed who was who, what factors were at play, and more importantly, why the media were churning out stories in such a myriad of ways. This helped me gain a broader lens into the UK media industry and how I (if given the opportunity) would want to use my influence to make a difference. On top of that, I spotted the firm that I currently work for, Milltown Partners, in that book and landed an interview after proactively reaching out to the company on LinkedIn. Five interview rounds later - I was in!

Since embarking on this journey over two years ago, it has been a continuous one of learning, and adapting. I have met some of the world's most influential figures and currently work on some very high-profile business projects for these clients. It's truly exciting.

When working in communications, you have a front-row seat to the latest current world events so you are incredibly in tune to what is happening across the world. You also have the opportunity to be an influential voice in advising clients on how they should think about issues that pertain to their organisations/businesses, and thereby bring about tangible impact. As a Black woman specifically, I feel I provide a unique perspective to conversations around the clients I work for based on my lived experiences and interpretation

of the world. I lean into this as a superpower and strength and I believe it makes me an effective media professional. I pivoted into this industry with little understanding of what it entails but just a deep sense of curiosity and desire to learn. It has exceeded my expectations and I am glad I bit the bullet and made a decision based on my instinct at the time.

In the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics 2021 census report, there are over 119,000 media professionals across Public relations and journalism. The majority of these professionals are based in London, given it is one of the world's most important media hubs. PR firms can specialise in a number of different communications disciplines e.g. privacy management, influencer management, crisis communications, reputation management, public affairs, media relations, leadership/executive communications, internal communications, speechwriting, and more.

Practising here as a Nigerian-British woman has provided enormous opportunities to expand my network, meet new people, and understand the industry beyond my day-to-day client tasks. London is also home to some of the world's most influential brands and businesses. I've tapped into that by attending events across the areas I'm personally invested and interested in, which include businesses owned by Black founders, beauty, fashion, food, and the arts. Being located in such a prime space is incredibly advantageous for my career and I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue building on this.

There are several significant challenges and hurdles one must learn how to adapt to and overcome as a Nigerian woman working in PR in the UK - there simply aren't enough of us in the industry. In a 2021 study conducted by the PR and Communications Association, they found that 3.5% of PR workers in the UK are of mixed ethnicity, 3% are Indian, 2% are Black



There are several significant challenges and hurdles one must learn how to adapt to and overcome as a Nigerian woman working in PR in the UK



African or Caribbean, and just under 2% are Black British. I fall into the 2% Black British. Add on top of that the layer of gender, and the statistics are even narrower. I've often found it to be quite an isolating experience being a minority in an industry that is so influential in shaping how people think, see, perceive, and observe the world around them. Other than the importance of having representation at all levels, media and communications are essentially storytelling which shapes and influences perceptions and in turn how people manoeuvre the world. By more Black women having a seat at the table, it means that we can influence those perceptions - making storytelling more representative and genuine. This is what change and making a difference is all about.

Since I started my career in Communications, I've worked across a range of projects in managing the reputations of corporate businesses, founders, and influential individuals. The advisory firm I work for, Milltown Partners, has a particular specialism in technology policy communications where we focus on providing strategic counsel to technology companies on the challenges they face i.e. responsible AI, data security, and child safety. Part of my role intersects with that work too.

Working for an advisory firm means I have the opportunity to work across a number of different client teams in multiple sectors and disciplines. This usually means my days feel fast-paced. Against the background of a 24/7 news cycle, I have to be alert to incoming wider socio-political trends that could potentially impact my clients. I regularly read articles in the business and technology press including The Guardian, Financial Times, Bloomberg, etc. Having this variety and breadth of work is different from working in-house where you tend to solely focus on the priorities of the company you are working for, and the sector issues that immediately impact them. Another key part of my role is utilising digital tools to support media monitoring moments that are relevant to my client. They are particularly helpful during high-profile moments that generate significant coverage.

Working in communications also means that you are liaising with journalists across beats relevant to your client, writing briefing notes for senior executives so they are best prepared for their media/engagement moments, and of course - networking. I also find working on pro bono clients a fulfilling part of my role. Our pro bono clients tend to be businesses that are working on impactful projects but need the additional support of a communications team to bolster their efforts further and clearly articulate their offering to specific audiences.

I'm particularly proud of the speaking opportunities I've engaged with in my career so far. Last year, Milltown Partners celebrated its 10th anniversary and as part of the celebrations, I interviewed the business legend - Natalie Massenet, Founder of Net-a-Porter and Imaginary Ventures. This was a great experience that I will cherish for a long time.

Bio



Senior Communications Analyst at Milltown Partners, Deborah Olubiye is a respected PR and Communications Expert with over 5+ years of experience accentuating milestones throughout the media, advertising, and traditional/digital marketing industries. Specializing heavily in forming authentic connections, Deborah holds extensive expertise in reputation management, media relations, diverse storytelling, narrative development, and the art of executing PR premieres that spark discussion throughout the community. Today, Deborah is passionate about continuously helping others place their best foot forward and ultimately gain what they value the most – increased exposure, a preservable reputation, and sustainable growth.

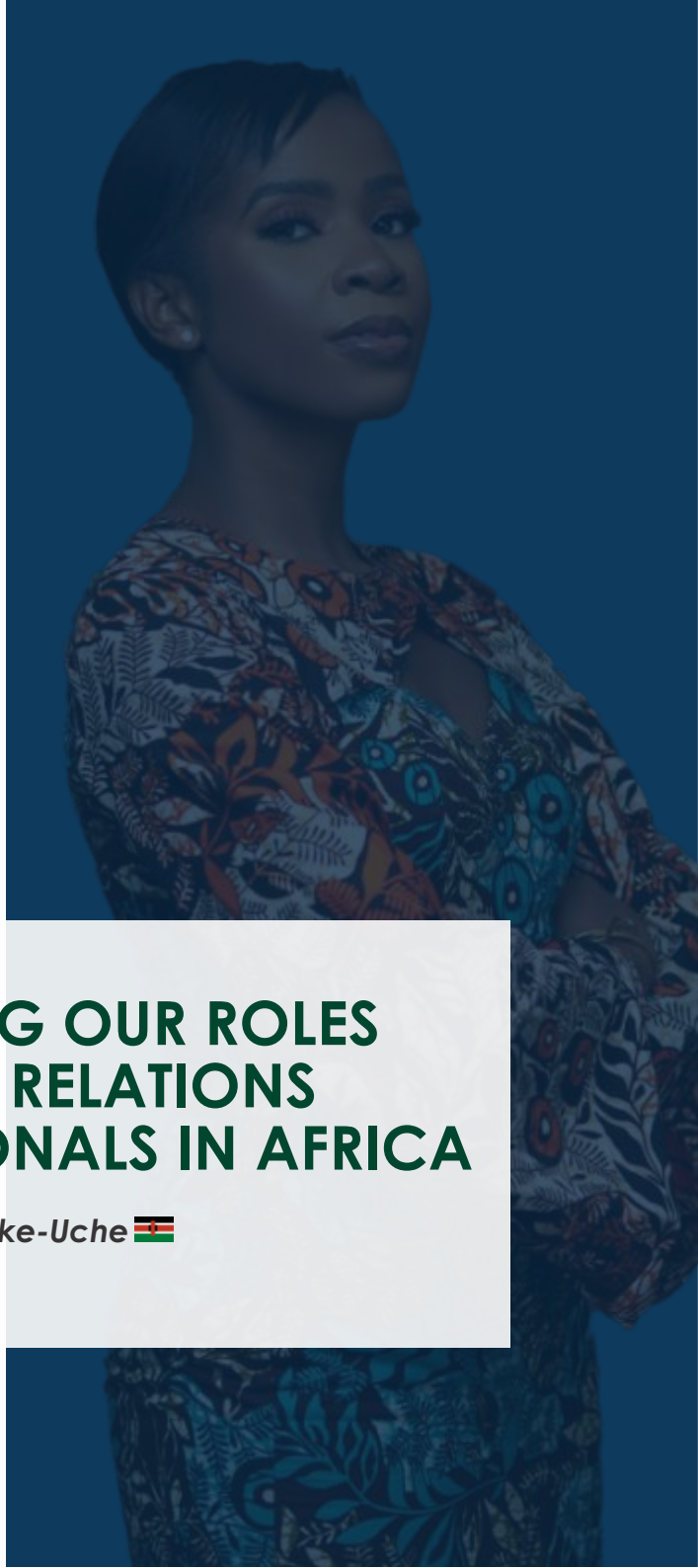
Prior to Milltown Partners, Deborah built a distinct professional blend of experiences spanning international development and project management before pivoting to communications. Notably, Deborah previously served as a Programme and Project Officer at the Houses of Parliament. There, she provided critical support in developing strategy, planning, and finance management, thus contributing to the successful execution of digital projects for key stakeholders in the House of Lords and House of Commons. This preceded various other roles founded in leadership, administration, and coordination, and underpinned by academic success. This includes studying Environment, Culture, and Innovation at Tsinghua University and at King's College London, where she served on several societies and was appointed a Global Health and Social Medicine Subject Ambassador.

Today, Deborah applies this dynamicity as a strategic communications analyst, advisor, and organisations consultant, ensuring all deliverances maximize image, enhance potential, and position teams for value-aligned exposure. Overall, Deborah respects the fluidity of mindful storytelling and propositioning, and every effort rests on her commitment to exceed the standards of how organisations and individuals want to be seen in the public eye. In addition, doing so while demonstrating that valuing the journey behind a story and remaining diligent to the client's vision are two concepts that can be done hand-in-hand.

Chapter
07

**RETHINKING OUR ROLES
AS PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROFESSIONALS IN AFRICA**

Njideka Akabogu Eke-Uche 🇳🇮





CHAPTER SEVEN

RETHINKING OUR ROLES AS PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS IN AFRICA

Njideka Akabogu Eke-Uche 

Introduction

If there is anything my experience interacting with PR professionals across the continent has taught me, it is that our experiences aren't particularly unique to us. Whether you're plying your trade in Lagos, or you're running your little agency in Nairobi or you're managing Comms for a multinational in Dar Es Salaam, the chances that we have to deal with the same or similar challenges are very high. I mean, there might be areas of differences that would be dependent on factors like the size of the market, the sophistication of the media landscape, and cultural nuances. But for the most part, we are all plagued by the same problems - an underpaid media industry that has become increasingly transactional; a poorly regulated industry that means anyone with a couple of thousand followers on Twitter can self-identify as a Public relations professional and no one can do jack all about it; budgets that are either not enough or non-existent budget; a dearth of talent among other issues.

This is by no means an article that offers a quick fix to these challenges. But I do believe that we'll be well on our way to solving them and doing more impactful work if we take a more strategic approach towards our practice.

Collaboration & Local Partnerships

One of my foremost African Agendas is that we have a continent where the borders are broken down - and where, as a Nigerian, I don't need a permit to work in Kenya. At the PRSK Annual Summit last year, I was on a panel advocating for the Africa Free Continental Trade Area, and a recurrent theme in that conversation was that if the act does take off, we'll no longer be confined to just being Kenyan or Nigerian professionals because we can practise anywhere on the continent without hitches. However, until that becomes a reality - and even after it does - the fact remains that if you're, for example, a Nigerian trying to break into the Tanzanian market, you're going to be an outsider looking in. You'll never be fully able to tell stories about your brand or clients in that region as well as a local. So you would need partners on the ground who know the market, understand the cultural nuances, and speak the language to help you execute optimally.



The Rethink

I think there is a need for deliberate rethinking and repositioning of our roles within the organisations that we work in and for the clients that we serve. If you conduct a survey among 10 Public relations practitioners today to understand the scope of our role, chances are that 8 of them will mention writing press releases in the first few lines of their response to you. And while there isn't anything wrong with this, I think that if we're to be taken a little more seriously by the people and businesses we serve, we need to do a better job of presenting what we do. We cannot continue to be relegated to just press releases and media clippings. If we're to bring true value to businesses, to organisations, to governments, we need to be in the rooms where decisions are made. We need to be well positioned as subject matter experts whose advice our governments, leaders, and other stakeholders can rely on.

A Seat At The Table

A significant percentage of the clientele that I've worked with over the course of my 10-year career have been media and entertainment businesses, and I remember instances where we've had to insist on not having movies or shows brought to us after they had already been shot. We want to be brought in at the commissioning stage, to be very much embedded in production and carried along every step of the way. This way we're not only able to tell a more holistic story about the project, but we're also able to flag or help avert any issues that may arise way ahead. I think that's where we need to get to as an industry - the point where the governments and businesses that we serve can rely on our advice on important matters.

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I think that if we're to be taken a little more seriously by the people and businesses we serve, we need to do a better job of presenting what we do.

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Telling the African story

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of young Nigerians migrating to countries like Canada, America, and the UK. And while this might be more common in Nigeria, countries across the continent are experiencing similar. According to the Africa PR & Communications Report (which I consider the most useful research into the African PR & Comms industry by the way), 90% of PR Practitioners around the continent will leave in a heartbeat. A severe brain drain is happening and nearly every employer you speak to will tell you we're losing our best talents. The truth however is that we cannot all leave. Not only is it ridiculously expensive and upsetting to uproot one's entire life and start afresh in a foreign country, but the truth again is that the West can't possibly accommodate all 1.3 billion of us.

So what gives? We do owe it to ourselves and our children to come together as a people and make Africa work. And as storytellers and perception managers, we are well-positioned to play a part in making this happen. How, you may ask? By being deliberate about telling the right stories about our country and continent at large. In his keynote address at the 34th Lagos PR Week, BHM's Group CEO, Ayeni Adekunle noted that Nigeria, "The country that gave the world the hottest pop music right now, one of the top three biggest film industries in the world... The country of Ankara, Paystack, Jollof rice, Adire, Chimamanda, Wole Soyinka, and so on. Yet she is still regularly seen, almost everywhere you go, as the country of yahoo yahoo, as the country of crime, as the country that is described often – if you were to quote that former US president – as a "shit hole"." You see, no one wants to invest in a shithole. We might not always be able to persuade our governments to act right, but we can contribute to shaping how our countries are perceived by the rest of the world.

I guess what I'm trying to say in essence is that we do have our work cut out for us. And it doesn't matter whether you're in Nigeria or Lesotho, we can all - as individuals and groups - play a part in giving our practice and by extension our continent a much-deserved facelift. I hope we all commit to doing our part.

Bio



Njideka Akabogu Eke-Uche is a Communications Expert with over a decade of experience crafting and deploying communication strategies to help global and Pan-African brands and organisations effectively connect with their audiences across Africa.

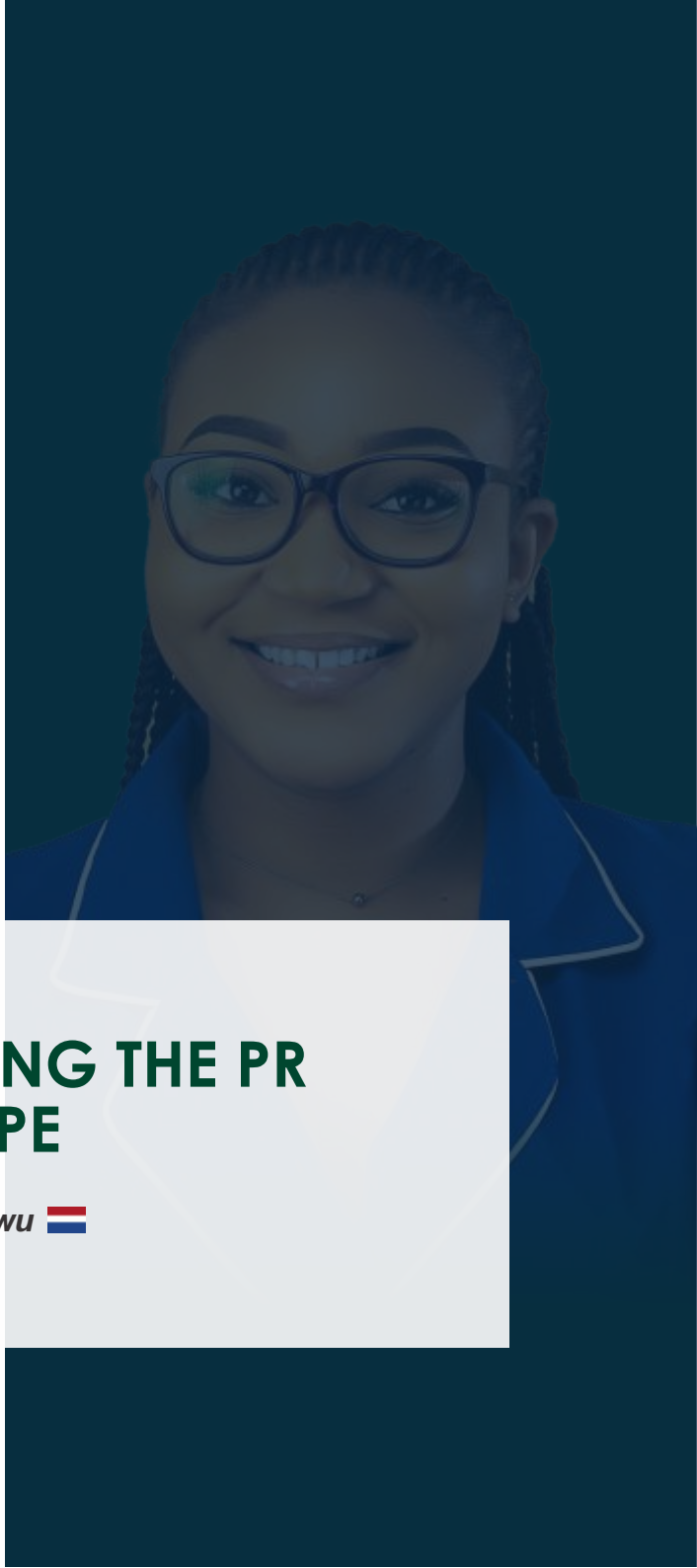
She currently serves as Regional Manager, East Africa, and Lead PR & Communications Adviser at ID Africa (BHM Holdings). She is charged with developing and implementing growth strategies, and business processes as well as providing day-to-day leadership on clients' accounts.

Njideka has driven communications and storytelling for international and Pan-African brands such as MultiChoice, Showmax, ViacomCBS, and Betway over the course of her career. Moreso, she has received some industry recognitions for her work including Brand Communicator's 35 under 35 top Marketing Professionals in Nigeria for 2022 and Y! Naija's New Establishment List 2019. Additionally, she was nominated as Rising PR Practitioner of The Year by NIPR in 2022.

Chapter
08

**NAVIGATING THE PR
LANDSCAPE**

By Amarachi Mbagwu 





CHAPTER EIGHT

NAVIGATING THE PR LANDSCAPE

Amarachi Mbagwu 

Introduction

As a Nigerian woman navigating the global PR landscape, my journey has been defined by adaptability and tenacity. From the vibrant city of Lagos to the international stage in Amsterdam, I have seen the transformative power of communication in shaping narratives and driving social change.

I started my career as a Personal Assistant to a Public Affairs and Communications director in Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company (Nigerian Bottling Company - NBC). It was in this role that my passion for Public Relations developed. The exposure to the intricacies of communication, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement fuelled my desire to dig deeper into the world of organisations. I continued to improve my skills through several courses and training programs, and today I am a proud member of the Nigeria Institute of Public Relations.

Throughout my career, I have achieved significant milestones. From transitioning my role as a personal assistant in NBC into more senior roles in Nigerian Breweries Plc to my current role at our Global HQ in Amsterdam, where I drive communication strategies for the global head office, each achievement serves as a testament to the limitless possibilities within the PR field.

In my professional journey, I have embraced a commitment to continuous learning, personal growth, and self-discovery—constantly pushing the boundaries of my capabilities. I have also been fortunate to receive tremendous support and encouragement from seasoned organisations professionals who paved the way before me. Whether it was my colleague at Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company who encouraged me to follow my passion, my Director who entrusted me with increasingly significant roles, my awesome team at Nigerian Breweries Plc, or the global community I collaborate with in Amsterdam, each opportunity has not only been a learning experience but also a chance to contribute meaningfully.

I consider myself a well-rounded Public relations professional. Diverse roles in communication, sustainability, and regulatory relations have equipped me to navigate various stakeholders, contributed to my holistic understanding of the field and gained valuable insights that prepare me for subsequent challenges. My approach always involves making a meaningful impact, fostering positive change, and shaping narratives grounded in authenticity and integrity. Each milestone in my journey signifies not only personal and professional growth but also a commitment to championing initiatives resonating with diverse audiences, and transcending geographical boundaries.



The Dutch Intersection

Nigeria, with its vibrant culture and dynamic landscape, has been both my canvas and my muse but practicing organisations as a Nigerian woman in Amsterdam offers a new perspective.

The international setting emphasizes innovative approaches and inclusivity. In Amsterdam, with over 70 nationalities in our global office, understanding diverse stakeholders, navigating cultural differences, and delivering innovative communication strategies are essential.

The cosmopolitan nature of Amsterdam, with an emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, is reflected in my practice. Personally, being a minority woman has not been a challenge, thanks to the diversity in Amsterdam and inclusive practices at HEINEKEN. My colleagues create a safe, thriving environment for me to succeed. As a matter of fact, in some instances, project teammates would lean on me with comments like "you're the native English speaker in the group - over to you lol".

Generally speaking (or writing), practicing organisations in Amsterdam provides a unique lens into global dynamics, showcasing the importance of cultural nuances in effective communication. The diverse atmosphere has influenced the way my communication is approached, emphasizing my need for a nuanced understanding of diverse cultural contexts. In such a diverse environment, tailoring messages to be inclusive and respectful of various perspectives is paramount.

Insights from the FMCG Sector

Delving into the peculiarities of the food and beverage manufacturing sector, where I have been a proud contributor since the early days of my career, effective organisations is crucial for several reasons.

The industry is a major player in the global market, catering to diverse consumer needs and preferences. Practicing organisations in this industry has provided insights into its unique challenges and opportunities. To have a successful Public

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In an age where social media influencers hold sway, collaborating with them strategically can amplify the reach and impact of Public Relations campaigns.

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relations career in the FMCG sector, you need to understand the importance of:

Consumer Trust and Transparency: Consumers in the food and beverage sector prioritize trust and transparency. Your organisations efforts should focus on communicating clear and accurate information about products and processes. Building and maintaining trust with consumers is vital. In an era where consumers are increasingly conscious of what they consume, being transparent about the origin and quality of products is a key Public relations strategy.

Regulatory Compliance: Nigeria is a highly regulated country and so is the industry. We are subject to stringent regulations concerning food safety, labelling, and environmental sustainability. Appreciating regulatory compliance as a partner to drive your organisations strategies is a key to success. Align with regulatory standards and demonstrate the company's commitment to compliance. This involves not just meeting the standards but also effectively communicating these efforts to the public.

Crisis Management: Given the sensitive nature of food-related products, effective crisis management is key. As a organisations professional in this sector, you must be well-prepared to manage potential crises, such as product recalls, complaints, or safety concerns, swiftly. Ensure your organisation invests in crisis management training for the Public relations teams as well as leadership team members or regional spokespersons. Rapid response and clear communication are important to avoid reputational damage.

Brand Image and Differentiation: Building a strong brand image is essential in a market saturated with various products. Focus on highlighting the unique propositions of the company's products, and emphasize quality, innovation, and sustainability. You can create a distinctive brand identity in a crowded marketplace by deploying the right strategic communication to set the brand apart.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging with your stakeholders and local communities and addressing social responsibility are becoming increasingly important. Your organisations activities should showcase the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. This involves not only meeting corporate social responsibility goals but also effectively communicating these efforts to the public. Ensure you regularly conduct stakeholder mapping exercises to ensure you are building and preserving the right connection.

Media Relations: Given the high public interest in food and beverage, media relations play a crucial role. Establishing positive relationships with journalists, bloggers, and influencers can significantly impact brand visibility and reputation. Invest in media parleys, meet and greet etc. In an age where social media influencers hold sway, collaborating with them strategically can amplify the reach and impact of Public relations campaigns.

Lessons from Client/Agency Dynamics

Transitioning into client/agency experiences, I have navigated intricate relationships with regulatory agencies, creative design firms, and core Public relations agencies. Each collaboration has left an indelible mark on my professional journey.

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In terms of creative design and core Public relations agencies, learning and leveraging their strengths have been pivotal.

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In dealing with regulatory agencies, I have learned that transparency builds trust. In a sector where adherence to regulations is paramount, open, and transparent communication with regulatory bodies is crucial. Proactive engagement, rather than reactive measures, has been instrumental in fostering positive relationships with regulatory authorities.

In terms of creative design and core Public relations agencies, learning and leveraging their strengths have been pivotal. Strategic media engagements and holistic campaign planning with core Public relations

agencies have been instrumental in shaping narratives and ensuring a consistent brand image. Creative design agencies have taught me the importance of storytelling with impact, where visuals and narratives seamlessly come together to create a compelling and memorable brand story.

Client/agency relationships have been a cornerstone in my journey. Through collaboration, creativity, and a relentless commitment to excellence, I have forged lasting partnerships and delivered tangible results that have helped shape brand perception and drive business success. Whether it is navigating the complexities of regulatory requirements, conceptualizing, and executing creative campaigns, or building and maintaining strong client relationships, each experience has added a layer to my professional growth.

In my career, one notable project involved managing the COVID-19 crisis and how it could have significantly impacted business continuity. The key lesson learned from this experience was the importance of building strong and positive relationships, proactive crisis management, and stakeholder engagement. Anticipating potential issues, developing comprehensive crisis management plans, and leveraging existing positive relationships with stakeholders were instrumental in successfully managing and mitigating the impact of the crisis.

In conclusion, my journey in organisations has been dynamic and enriching from Lagos to Amsterdam, from local to global landscapes. Each phase has contributed to my growth as a professional and as an individual. As a Nigerian woman, my unique perspective adds a layer of diversity and cultural awareness to my approach, influencing the way I navigate the international Public relations arena.

From shaping communication strategies at the global headquarters to contributing to the vibrant food and beverage sector, my experiences have been diverse yet interconnected. Navigating multicultural nuances in Amsterdam has broadened my understanding of effective communication, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and diversity.

The food and beverage industry, with its unique challenges, has provided me with insights into the critical role of organisations in building trust, ensuring compliance, managing crises, and creating a strong brand presence. Lessons from regulatory agencies, creative design, and core Public relations agencies have further refined my skills, offering a holistic perspective on the multifaceted nature of organisations.

As I contribute to Volume II of the Experiencing PR book, I aim to share these insights and lessons learned. My narrative puts in a not so nutshell not just a personal journey but a collective experience that I hope will resonate with professionals across borders. In the spirit of diversity, inclusion, and celebration of International Women's month, I hope my story adds a valuable perspective to the tapestry of voices in the field of organisations.

Bio



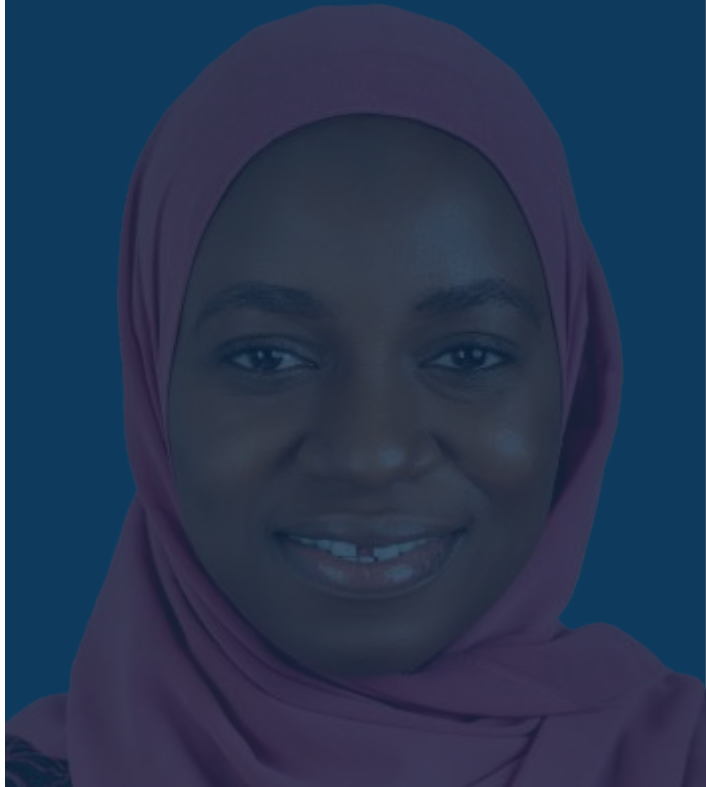
Amarachi Mbagwu is a dynamic and accomplished Communications, Sustainability, and Regulatory Relations Manager with a proven track record in developing and executing impactful communication strategies. Currently based in Lagos, Nigeria, and Amsterdam, Netherlands, Amarachi excels in positively influencing public perception, shaping brand identity, and fostering internal engagement.

With a comprehensive background in the Food and Beverage sector, Amarachi has demonstrated excellence in various roles, including her current position, overseeing Global Head Office Communications on a global assignment at HEINEKEN International B.V. In her prior role as Communications Manager at Nigerian Breweries Plc, a member of The HEINEKEN Company, Amarachi successfully led the development and implementation of a comprehensive communication strategy, cultivating positive relationships with media, government, NGOs, communities, and other stakeholders.

Amarachi's proficiency extends to navigating regulatory landscapes, ensuring compliance, and contributing to the successful delivery of sustainability initiatives. She is adept at spearheading transformative communication strategies for critical projects, managing employee engagement, and executing business strategy initiatives.

An alumna of AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY, Amarachi holds a Bachelor of Science (B.SC.) in Economics with Second Class Upper honors and is a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

Chapter
09



EXPERIENCING PR:

The RG Perspective

By Rafiat Gawat ■ ■



CHAPTER NINE

EXPERIENCING PR:

The RG Perspective

Rafiat Gawat ■ ■

Public Relations Career:

I have always been interested in Public Relations. In my undergraduate days, I was mostly 'PRO' for all the associations I belonged to, from my departmental association to school associations. I however found – even back then – that although the perception of the role was simply to oversee publicity, I did way more than that. I did a lot of what I now know to be stakeholder mapping/engagement, managing publics, and so on, all of which turned out to be the foundation of my journey.

After 4 years of studying Mass Communication at the undergraduate level (first class), I went on to focus on Corporate Communication and Public Affairs at the Masters level (distinction). Currently, I am working toward a Doctorate in Business Administration focusing on Business in the Digital World.

Aside from internships in advertising agencies in my undergrad, I started out working in financial services, from Operations (FX) to Customer Service, then Contact Center and finally Strategy and Communications, for close to six years. In the years following that, I have practiced Corporate Communication and Corporate Affairs in a conglomerate that operates in 13 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia and has subsidiaries in so many sectors.

My career in PR can therefore be described as somewhat linear.

As the years have progressed, I have been privileged to work in organisations where my career goals aligned with the organisations' overall vision, and the leadership gave me and my team room to learn, grow and spread our wings. This has encouraged me to explore PR in a number of ways and be a part of phenomenal projects. For example:

I authored the first version of a book that was used for financial literacy for kids and was eventually adopted for mass production by the Central Bank of Nigeria.

I was part of an acquisition (on the divestment side) of a regional beverage business by a global giant.

I have supported a number of impact-driven projects that had a direct effect on human lives, with immediately palpable yet lifelong benefits.

I have done a massive re-branding exercise from end-to-end, driving adoption, conducting brand assurance, and being the custodian of the brand overall.

I mentor, and I am being mentored – I am a big advocate of peer-to-peer mentorship.

There have been so many more, but I like to think that I am a part of something magnificent being built and that in itself is the single largest milestone I have.

Country of Practice

Practicing PR in Nigeria has been an interesting mixed bag. I practice majorly in Nigeria, as over 60% of our businesses are situated there. I would, however, point out that, in my experience, while there are a few cultural differences, there isn't much of a difference in the core principles of conducting PR in West Africa and largely in Asia. Certain trends are also somewhat universal, including the proliferation of social media use (and abuse), 'influencer marketing' to drive narratives, cultural sensitivity due to internal (national) diversity, changing media landscape – more digital than ever, conversations around AI usage and

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You cannot communicate what you don't know - as a PR person, building your knowledge base is essential.

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impact, among others. 'Pay-to-Play', a topic I have written about previously, is also a core part of PR in most environments, aside from the West.

I was privileged to do a placement with an Oil and Gas company in Aberdeen, UK, and I had the opportunity to see PR being done differently – not necessarily better. There is a bit of surface-level 'sanctimonious-ness' that drives the practice there that I found rather amusing. PR, when done well, should be practised in as pragmatic a way as possible to avoid issues such as greenwashing among others.

I believe it might also be worth sharing that as a female practitioner, I have always been curious about the fact that at the top of PR (in Nigeria) are mostly men, and at the entry stage, we have mostly women. I think I can safely assume that while the entry barrier is somewhat non-existent, the glass ceiling does exist. Having had a somewhat accelerated career growth, I look around me and it is still mostly men. I have, however, seen more women-owned/led PR agencies, but the legacy ones who lead the market are largely male-led.

As a woman in any space, we know how much of a necessity it is to amplify our voices, both literally and figuratively. It is no different in the practice of PR in my experience. However, while I have seen more women breaking into the age-long 'Boys' Club', it is yet to be seen if it will become a mixed club or even a 'Girls' Club' long term – I am hopeful for a healthy mix. Again, in my experience in PR, there are more millennial female mentors than Boomers or Gen Xers; this is not the same for male mentors, although I have seen that most of the male mentors have a good mix of genders in their mentee pools. Younger female millennial mentors in PR are more deliberate about mentoring female mentees. I must reiterate yet again that all of this is my personal experience operating in the PR industry over the last decade and change.

Industry Focus in PR

I currently work in a conglomerate that operates across multiple business verticals, so we operate in a lot of industries. I would, however, choose Food and Agribusiness as it constitutes a significant chunk of our portfolio.

I think it goes without saying that: you cannot effectively communicate what you don't understand.

This therefore means that you must become a subject matter expert for whatever area in the value chain that you play. For us, we operate from end-to-end in multiple value chains, so as you can imagine, I have gone through onsite immersion in communities, farms, factories, commodities markets, regulators, and so on. It is a continuous learning process, working with all subsidiaries to familiarise properly with the organisations, stakeholders, issues, competitors, and milestones.

Community relations is also key for us, and this usually starts from the day we decide to have anything to do with said community. We engage, conduct a needs assessment, and plan and deliver relevant interventions, with the aim of ensuring that our collaboration with them is mutually beneficial, in a dignifying way for all parties.



Participating in industry associations that may require collaboration with competitors and those offering complementary services, appropriate terminologies' usage, and monitoring of trends are also very vital to practising PR in that industry or any other industry.

Client/Agency Experience

I have worked with many agencies over the years. I think I have gone through the whole gamut—by size, expertise, (gendered) staff composition, etc. I have had one too many experiences of agencies trying to use a one-size-fits-all approach disguised by a beautiful pitch. On the flip side, I have also worked with agencies that have done phenomenal work, are highly proactive, and are content to keep working behind the curtain (in the moment) - they do not center themselves while on the field.

Because we operate such a large and complex business, I have learned that the most important part of our brief is a detailed 'brand walkthrough' for a potential agency, no matter the size of the project. This can be time-consuming; therefore, we do not like to do it often.

We have also only ever recorded success with agencies that are as close to our business as possible, and as proactive and responsive as can be. Our current PR agency has been with us for almost 5 years now and a change is NOT imminent.

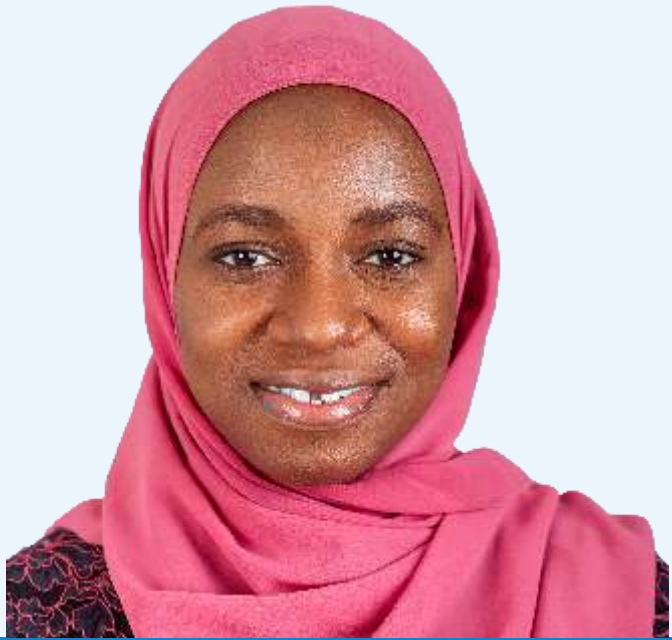
On the flip side, I have also found that agencies find it hard to work with clients whose requirements are either unclear or constantly changing. This is understandable, and for everyone, it happens from time to time. Throughout my career, this has regrettably happened a few times due to issues beyond our control. I have, however, learned more and more that although some situations cannot be helped, we have to put measures in place to ensure that the effects are mitigated as much as possible.

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Soft skills are key ingredients in your PR success.

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Bio



Rafiat is currently the Head of Corporate Communication at Tropical General Investments Group – a conglomerate operating over 20 subsidiaries across 13 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. She is a seasoned corporate communication and public affairs expert with over 13 years of experience in diverse industries and multicultural environments.

Connect with Rafiat on LinkedIn (Rafiat Gawat) and on Twitter (@_Rafiat), where you can check her #RG_Comms with which she shares her thoughts on Public Relations and Communications topics.

About Us

Nigerian Women in PR, established in 2019, is a social impact professional organisation set up to advocate for, and provide growth resources to, Nigerian women working as public relations and communications professionals across the world. Through our programs, initiatives and strategic partnerships, we provide **a resource hub for learning** and professional growth of our members; **promote the continuous relevance of members** as the Public Relations and Communications profession evolves; **platform the RESULTS** of Nigerian Women practising in the profession; and **promote the understanding and value** of the public relations profession

Membership Categories

Registered Membership - Open to all female PR and Communications professionals of Nigerian descent

Premium Membership - exclusively for experienced Nigerian women working in public relations and communications in Nigeria and the diaspora.

OUR PROGRAMS



Read more on our website:

www.ngwomeninpr.org

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NIGERIAN WOMEN
in PUBLIC RELATIONS

Premium Membership

This membership category is exclusively for experienced Nigerian women working in public relations and communications at home and abroad.

Membership Benefits

- Bi-monthly business visits from NGWIPR to Premium members' offices.
- Participation in quarterly mentorship sessions for networking opportunities
- Discounted PR related advert slots in weekly newsletters.
- Opportunity to contribute to biennial publications
- Speaking opportunity at NGWIPR's industry events
- Professional reference on demand
- Right of first refusal on referrals for senior PR & Comms roles
- Access to networking events and global network
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Membership Criteria
5+ years experience

Membership Fee
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