PROFESSIONALISM OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

By

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To my parents, Paul & Josie Ubwa
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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

PROFESSIONALISM OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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International Public Relations has been a topic of research in the field for many decades. However, the majority of the scholarship in international public relations comes from the United States with focus of the research on Europe and Asia, and all the different publications have relatively distinct compositions and authorships. Although there is a lot of scholarship on international public relations (regardless of the limitations of the research), the scholarship on Africa is very limited as it is a continent that is rarely studied in this research area.

South Africa and Nigeria are the two countries in Africa with the most research on public relations, and as time goes by, findings on these countries become more and more insufficient. The topic of professionalism of public relations is not one that has been explored in much depth in Africa at large, and Nigeria in specific.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to understand the state of public relations in Nigeria as regards professionalism, and contribute, thereby, to the body of literature on public relations in Nigeria and Africa, to the body of literature on international public relations, and to theory building for international public relations through comparative public relations.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

International public relations has been a topic of research for the past couple of decades. The early ‘90s and the beginning of the 21st century brought two main phases of growth and development in the area of international public relations research. The early ‘90s brought the first phase, and was accompanied by trade publications and academic journals. The early 21st century brought the second phase, and was accompanied by academic journals and the publication of books. With all this progress in the field of international public relations research, international academic authors have yet to collaborate, and this area remains underdeveloped. An area much more developed, however, is the collaboration among the academic and professional communities (Molleda & Laskin, 2005).

The majority of the scholarship in international public relations comes from the United States, and all the different publications have relatively distinctive compositions and authorships. While book chapters are authored predominantly by professors, trade publications are authored predominantly by professional consultants, and academic journals are authored equivalently by professors and professionals in the public relations profession. “The institutional affiliations of the most prolific authors are largely U.S research universities: University of Florida, University of Maryland and University of Missouri” (Molleda & Laskin, 2005, p. 4). Although this is the case, Europe and Asia remain the focus of most research in international public relations, and the United Kingdom happens to be the country outside of the United States that has majority of the research.
With the amount of research done in international public relations, the kind of scholarship varies greatly, but one area of scholarship that is still lacking, with respect to this topic, is theory development. Many articles that have been written focus more on a.) The excellence theory, b.) Organizational communications theories, or c.) Ethics/social responsibility theory development (Molleda & Laskin, 2005). Some theories have been completely ignored in the research process. However, not only theories are ignored. Issues such as image and reputation are also ignored. According to Molleda and Laskin (2005) “Introspective scholarship is somewhat present, mostly focusing on the issues of profession and pedagogy” (p. 4). Keeping the principal focus on implementing certain programs and campaigns aids the development of scholarship in practice and application.

The research that has been done in the area of international public relations does not reflect its true sense. Instead, what can be found in most of the scholarship is a description of public relations as a profession in certain regions or countries. International public relations research in its true sense should focus on issues that are international, such as public relations practices between countries or multinational corporations. However, this kind of scholarship is uncommon (Molleda & Laskin, 2005).

Due to the fact that there are specific factors in different countries that may affect the growth and development of international public relations, contextualized research has also been done to understand these factors. However, some variables such as culture and socioeconomic environment have been researched in much more depth than others such as legal environments or activism. The issues discussed in trade publications and academic journals reflect some correlation, but book chapters seem to
have a different perspective. Nevertheless, “the scholarship relies primarily on quantitative research methodologies . . . [and] on the U.S. public relations multidisciplinary literature” (Molleda & Laskin, 2005, p.4).

Although there is a lot of scholarship on international public relations (regardless of the limitations of the research), the scholarship on Africa is very limited as it is a continent that is not often studied in international public relations research. South Africa and Nigeria are the two countries in Africa with the most research on public relations, and as time goes by, findings on these countries become more and more insufficient. This thesis therefore seeks to elaborate on the state of public relations in Nigeria and contribute, thereby, to the body of literature on international public relations.

The public relations profession is not new to the Nigerian workforce; however, it has failed to grow and become very significant. Prior to the early ‘90s public relations was used widely in Nigeria and was growing at a steady pace, but the country reached a phase where it started to experience inordinate and unanticipated failure in the growth and development of the profession. In recent years, the country has been incapable of making any substantial improvement in the public relations field (Akingbolu, 2012).

The establishment of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and the Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria (PRCAN) was an attempt to drive the development of public relations. The PRCAN has been relentless in its fight for this development by ensuring that all chief executives are registered by the NIPR to practice public relations (Akingbolu, 2012). Some government agencies across the country have seen very slight growth in public relations as a result of the PRCAN. Even so, rather than communication management as the focus of public relations efforts at the
government level, information dissemination seems primary. That said, even within the confines of the NIPR, the lack of specialization in public relations has caused the profession to become one that any, and everybody, is fit to practice (Akingbolu, 2010). This is one challenge that is responsible for the lack of professionalism of public relations in the country.

The lack of specialization in public relations could be a result of the fact that as opposed to a full curriculum designed for public relations to be taught as a major, it is embedded in mass communications as an elective. There has been no clear-cut difference between both, therefore people with degrees in mass communication feel well equipped to take on the duties of public relations practitioners (Owobu, 2011). Public relations is also inappropriately used synonymously with journalism, and although the understanding of this profession may be gradually increasing, Nigeria is nowhere close to advanced societies who have a good grasp on the knowledge of public relations (Ogudoro, 2011). Although the public relations field has a few domestic companies that are well-established and recognized, and several decent active practitioners, it has been driven by ordinary advertising, and its tools are underutilized and limited. Public relations is gradually deteriorating behind advertising, and its steps toward becoming more professional in the country are hindered (Sudhaman, 2010). Due to this, there is more demand for public relations practitioners by society than the country is able to produce through the NIPR. There are also shortages of professors to teach public relations and students to learn public relations at the undergraduate level; this results in limited opportunities to educate practitioners (Owobu, 2011).
Public relations illiteracy reaches farther than just practitioners alone. The publics are an essential group as well. Okusanya (2010), a practitioner who runs one of the most reputable communication organizations in the country, recognizes that public relations is limited in wealth of knowledge, and reiterates the reasons why practitioners need to remain fervent in educating publics on what public relations really is. According to Okusanya (2010), there is a misunderstanding about what public relations is, as some people consider it a form of blackmail or propaganda. People are stuck on the impression that public relations makes a deliberate effort to influence public opinion. Therefore, attempting to correct these negative impressions can help the profession move toward professionalism (Okusanya, 2010). Otalor and Obisesan (2012) assert that quality of practice has the ability to trump all the negative impressions about public relations, and, therefore, the professionals in the field have the challenge of gaining professionalism by quality practice and becoming indispensable in the minds of their clients.

The misunderstandings about public relations by clients and publics could be fueled by the lack of effective leadership in the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR). According to a report by The Quadrant Company, one of the most prominent and successful local public relations consultancies in the country, the NIPR has been incapable of managing the difficulties encountered by the field because in the recent past, members have been absorbed in power struggles over leadership and have been unable to focus. Over the past two years, the constantly declining economy, as well as corruption and misuse of authority by those in power, have not aided the growth and development of public relations (Sudhaman, 2010).
These problems that go beyond the public relations profession affect other professions as well, and according to Ogudoro (2011), a public relations consultant and a program administrator for NIPR’s Accelerated Certification Program, communication gaps are connected with a lot of problems in the world, regardless of the level of analysis. Therefore, professional communication requires one to converse with the people, understand the magnitudes of their problems, and incorporate their standpoints in resolving the problems. The government of the country has at no level – whether federal, state, or local – exhibited this kind of communication (Ogudoro, 2011). They do not recognize the importance of using public relations practitioners in governance (Owobu, 2011). The country certainly needs some restructuring, and it could start with public relations. There is poor patronage of public relations by the government – it goes from very little to none at all (Akingbolu, 2012). If a society does not survive and flourish, which is the aim of public relations, all other efforts are inevitably going to be short-lived (Ogudoro, 2011). Because of a society that is not very healthy, many professions are suffering and public relations is at the top of the list.

This background on public relations in Nigeria draws from most of the available scholarship that concentrates on the lack of growth and development of the profession, and areas in which it falls short. Little to no research on the professionalism of public relations in the country exists. Consequently, the focus of this thesis is on the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria.

**Significance and Rationale**

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Kelly (1998), for any occupation to be considered a profession, 5 criteria are required: A body of knowledge based on theory
and research, a program of formal education, professional associations, codes of ethics, and professional autonomy and allegiance.

Public relations in Nigeria cannot be considered a profession following these criteria. As stated by Molleda and Alhassan (2006), practitioners emphasize the importance of an exact body of knowledge for the effective and ethical practice of the profession, and that is still in progress. The country still does not have a good curriculum for teaching public relations (Amujo & Melewar, 2011), thus no satisfactory program of formal education exists. Professional associations exist, however they have been deemed ineffective by practitioners, and need better governance. Codes of ethics exist under the NIPR, but are violated due to corruption and abuse of power by the leadership and government of the country. Although members of the institute are required to conduct professional activities with a conscious regard for public interest, putting forth truth and honesty of purpose above all other considerations (Ogbidi, 2010), there is still a great lack of respect for those expectations. For the same reason, public relations has not been professionalized or legitimized in the country (Odubela, 2007), and until that happens, autonomy in the profession cannot be achieved.

For public relations to remain a relevant profession in Nigeria, there is a great need for it to become a professionalized field. The promotion of public relations in African economies, especially Nigeria, is an opportunity that the dynamism of globalization presents (Amujo & Melewar, 2011). The world is becoming a global stage, and public relations is one of the professions that has been greatly affected by this change. This change that globalization has brought to the industry of public relations has caused a rise in the study of international public relations. Culbertson and Chen
(1996) outlined two types of research in the area of international public relations – comparative public relations and international public relations. Comparative public relations studies the practice of the profession from one country to another taking into account similarities and differences based on cultural norms, and social, economic and political environments, with the aim of identifying problems or challenges facing many nations and searching for generic variables that can apply to those problems. In contrast, international public relations focuses more on the processes of multinational organizations. These efforts were made in conjunction with theory building for international public relations practice.

Culbertson and Chen’s (1996) comparative public relations provides a basis for the research of factors unique to Nigeria. Studying the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria is significant because it will elaborate a little bit more on the state of public relations in Nigeria, and West Africa at large – in as much as Nigeria is the most populous country in the continent and has a lot of potential for the profession. Similar issues facing other developing countries may also be brought to the surface for further research. This study may also be useful in identifying general principles or variables and factors that differ locally from one country to another for the purposes of theory building since none exists for international public relations practice.

**Statement of Purpose**

Previous studies and literature on the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria are very limited. However, some scholars have traced the development of the profession since its preliminary stages more than one hundred and fifty years ago; examined some challenges facing the profession, and conducted some studies to gain more understanding of the current state of the profession in the country. The purpose of
this study therefore, is to determine the level on which public relations in Nigeria stands with regards to professionalism, to find out the possible environmental aspects that may be determining the professional status of public relations professionalism in the country, and to understand possible ways to enable a steady growth toward achieving a professional status for the field in the country. This study also seeks to further research in the area of not only professionalism of public relations in Nigeria, but also in the area of international public relations as well.

The professionalism of public relations in many different parts of the world, has for the most part, been assessed by researching and studying the professional as opposed to the profession. This study seeks to assess the professionalism of the profession rather than the professional in order to contribute to the limited existing literature from this perspective.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides a background for the study of the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria, and is divided into four main sections. The first section begins with historical definitions of the term "professionalism" and how that has gradually changed over time. Theoretical perspectives of professionalism which include the interpretations of the construct of professionalism – as a normative value system and as an ideology – are also discussed in detail. The changes in the construct of professionalism have been theorized in two major ways, and there has been a shift from occupational to organizational professionalism. Exploring the literature on these aspects serves to elaborate on the progress of professionalism over the years.

The second section focuses on the criteria of a profession and how public relations fits into that criteria. Amidst various criteria of a profession provided by many scholars, this study explores public relations professionalism from 5 main criteria: a body of knowledge, formal education, code of ethics, professional associations, and autonomy.

The following section discusses contextual professionalism by highlighting: a.) what areas have been previously studied in the public relations profession with respect to professionalism, and b.) how professionalism can differ from one geographical region to another, and even more specifically, how certain factors within a geographical region are able to affect professionalism.

The final section of this literature review focuses on public relations in Nigeria – the lack of growth and development of the profession in the country, as well as its inability to meet the requirements or criteria of a profession. Each of these four sections
guides the formulation of the research questions to be able to fulfill the purpose of the study. The research questions that will guide the research aspect of this study are listed after the final section.

**Professionalism**

A.M Carr-Saunders, a British social scientist, was the first to discuss the topic of professionalism in 1928, and defined it in terms of four distinct areas – specialized skills and training, minimum fees/salaries, establishment of professional associations, and codes of ethics that governed professional practice (Yeh, 1998.) Johnson (1972) defined professionalism as “a peculiar type of occupational control rather than an expression of the inherent nature of particular occupations” (p. 45). Professionalism is therefore framed as a certain method of work organization in which the control over work is retained by workers as opposed to consumers. VanZANDT (1990) defined professionalism as an attitude that influences individuals to pay attention to their specific professions image and ideals.

The establishment of various new professions was stimulated by the industrial revolution in the 19th century. However, defining what exactly a profession is has not been easy. It was defined by Cogan (1953) as focusing on the occupational aspects of employing “an understanding of the theoretical structure of some department of learning or science” (p. 34). In contrast, Lennertz (1991) stated that identifying with public purpose, a fiduciary relationship, and intellectual tradition are the essence of a profession.

The essence of a profession, therefore, “could be argued as practitioners receiving a special training in a specific body of knowledge leading to an exclusive area
of practice, of then being learned, and of them as having a duty or social responsibility” (Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008, p. 225).

**Theoretical Perspectives of Professionalism**

Interpretations of the construct of professionalism in sociological literature have been contrasting and contradictory (Evetts 2003). These various interpretations have been grouped into two – normative value system and controlling ideology.

Professionalism both as a value system and as ideology can work on three levels: Macro – which includes societal, state and market; meso – which includes organizations and institutions and micro – which includes groups and actors. However, there is an obvious difference between the two systems. Professionalism as a value system reflects more optimism about the progressive contributions of the construct with regards to work requirements (Evetts, 2003). This view is grounded in the belief that work is of notable worth either to the public or to the interests of the state (Evetts, 2005). On the other hand, professionalism as ideology reflects more negativity on the construct as a dominant way of socially controlling practitioners (Evetts 2003).

Professionalism, has for a long time, been differentiated by sociologists of professional occupations as a special way of work organization and worker control, and real advantages for not only practitioners, but also their clients. It was described as a ‘third logic’ by Friedson (2001) who placed a lot of emphasis on how important it is to maintain ‘professionalism’ as a distinguished method of work and practitioner control in service work in the public sector. The history behind this interpretation of professionalism is lengthy. However, the fact that professionals are now working in large-scale organizations as well as international firms is changing the construct.
Theorizing the Changes in the Construct of Professionalism

This change in the construct of professionalism has been theorized in two ways in the sociology of professions literature. The first is to establish a connection between the Anglo-American and European contexts of professional work which have been previously different. The second is to keep the focus on professionalism as the key construct as opposed to professionalization or professions.

Anglo-American and European Contexts of Professionalism

These two contexts have been differentiated by sociologists of professions for a very long time, and fundamental historical reasons exist for the differences in the analyses of professions in each context (Evetts, 2012).

The Anglo-American context headed the birth of the sociology of professions, and "identified the professions as associations of gentlemen that emerge autonomously to institutionalize and regulate a specific area of practice" (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008, p. 138). An elaborated sociology of professions and a large number of market-related professions were both created by Anglo-American less centralized state governments and moderately independent universities and free professions, and these had a sturdy influence globally (Evetts, 2012). A founding feature of professionalization in this Anglo-American context is the autonomy of professions (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008).

On the other hand, the European context “has been more closely connected to the growth of the state and to state bureaucracies, where university-educated officials executed public authority legitimized by their credentialing, the bureaucratic legalistic hierarchy, and their aristocratic or elite status, where trust is related to the delegated legal authority and legitimacy is parallel to professional knowledge and competence”
The model of the Anglo-American context of professionalism has also been referred to as ‘licensed market-monopolizers’ and the model of the European one as ‘bureaucratic office holders’ (Evetts, 2012).

**Keeping the Focus on Professionalism**

Eraut (1994) explained the thought that sometimes comes to mind when we discuss professionalism is the quality or standard of work which, while not completely inaccurate, refers more to being of professional standard which is only an example of professionalism (Kanes, 2010). Julia Evetts (2005) argued for the same shift – from the concepts of profession (“a distinct and generic category of occupational work” (p. 3) and professionalization (“the process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group” (p. 3) to that of professionalism, and how it is used. She conceptualized professionalism as both an occupational value and as a discourse. (Evetts, 2011) The “discourse of professionalism” (p. 3) as Evetts (2005) referred to it, is being used more often as a marketing slogan by occupations and organizations to attract potential customers, and can be considered a dominant means of occupational change in a wide variety of occupations and social control.

Faulconbridge and Muzio (2008) stated that an argument can be made for a shift toward organizational professionalism, which refers to a new form of professionalism where the main focus is placed on organizations and the way they are run. Evetts (2011), just like Faulconbridge and Muzio (2008), theorized the idea of this new professionalism as a contrast between ‘organizational’ professionalism and ‘occupational’ professionalism. This perspective of professionalism opposes Friedson’s ‘third logic’ perspective. The implementation of professionalism is now not only defined organizationally, but also contains managerialism and commercialism, which are logics
of the organization and the market. Due to this, professionalism can no longer be referred to as a characteristic ‘third logic.’ Evetts (2005) further explained that although differences, and in many ways contrasts, exist between occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism, they are both ideal typical forms of professionalism in knowledge-based and service-sector work.

Occupational professionalism as defined by Evetts (2005) is “a discourse constructed within professional occupational groups and incorporates collegial authority” (p. 9). It is characterized by the development of strong occupational identities and work cultures through collective and extensive systems of education and occupational or career training; practitioner autonomy and voluntary valuation and decision-making in difficult cases; relations of trust from clients and employers alike to practitioners; and associations and institutions monitoring professional ethics (Evetts 2005).

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Located in Durkheim’s model of occupations as moral communities. Linked to Weberian models of organization

(Evetts, 2005, p. 10)
Managers in work organizations are increasingly using organizational professionalism a discourse of control. Organizational professionalism is characterized by regulation and accountability through externalized forms, standardized procedures of work, structures of authority and decision-making that are hierarchical, goal-setting and evaluation of performance, rational-legal forms of authority, and managerialism. Increased occupational training and the certification of workers/practitioners/employees are means by which organizational professionalism can be achieved.

As can be seen above, the construct of professionalism is a growing and changing field, and so is its appeal to occupations and organizations. The aspirations of these occupations and organizations to gain professionalism cause them to try to find measures with which they can track and compare their progress to occupations that have already achieved professionalism (Bloland & Tempel, 2004). Therefore, it is important to outline the ways in which professionalism can be measured for the purpose of tracking the progress of occupations attempting to become professions. As this thesis is focused on assessing professionalism of the profession as opposed to the professional in a West African context, it is important to understand the criteria of a profession. This assessment will be guided by the two perspectives above; that is, occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism.

**Criteria of a Profession**

Assessing how many professional traits an occupation has against a standard list of characteristics is a typical method of roughly assessing the extent of professionalism of an occupation (Bloland & Tempel, 2004). Many lists that have been compiled for the purpose of assessing professionalism usually assess the professional from different perspectives. However, there are no lists in the literature on professionalism of
occupations that are based on assessing strictly occupational professionalism or organizational professionalism. Consequently, the definitions of both perspectives have been used to determine which criteria of professionalism belong with which perspective.

One of the oldest and, arguably, still most referenced methods of measuring professionalism is Hall’s (1968), which consisted of 50 items. By means of factor analysis afterwards, Snizek (1972) revised these items and cut them down to 25. The five different dimensions that are frequently affiliated with professionalism and are measured by this scale are:

1. Identification with a professional reference group
2. Public service orientation
3. Autonomy
4. Belief in self-regulation
5. Sense of calling to the field (Miller & Fry, 1976)

This scale wasn’t the only thing Hall (1968) used to measure professionalism. He saw professional attributes as attitudinal and structural, and Wilensky’s (1964) work informed a lot of the structural attributes he used which include a full-time occupation created as a response to the needs of society; the establishment of a knowledge-based and university affiliated training school; professional associations created to implement licensing, and define professional responsibilities as well as proficiency of emergent members; and a code of ethics enforced by the professional association and manages the relations between colleagues and the public/clients. Subsequently, Hall added a fifth attribute which he claimed was both structural and attitudinal – professionals’ ability to use their discretion and expertise without being questioned through the presence of professional autonomy.
Bloland and Tempel (2004) asserted that there is a customary list of characteristics of a profession which is comprised of 5 factors which include:

1. A body of expert knowledge with a theoretical base acquired through an extended period of university training
2. Devotion to service
3. A professional association that’s active
4. A code of ethics
5. Control over credentialing and work application

**Professionalism of Public Relations**

The public relations industry is beginning to recognize the idea of professionalism as an important one that can no longer be disregarded. For several decades, work has been done by practitioners and educators to transform public relations into an acknowledged profession that is part of the dominant leading professions (Ryan & Martinson, 1990). According to Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes (2008), the topic of public relations professionalism appears in a lot of work done in the 1980’s and 1990’s. To be able to determine the extent to which public relations meets the fundamentals of professionalism, the literature on professionalism in the social sciences has been studied by public relations scholars (Serini, 1993). Professionalism in public relations has seen a number of phases. However, “little is known about how well the industry is progressing in settling on standards by which professionalism may be judged and upheld” (Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008, p. 224).

The analysis of literature on academic research concerning public relations professionalism was mapped in a longitudinal study by Abdullah (2012) and six themes
that can be contemplated in terms of studying the educational and professional criteria of public relations emerged:

1. **Exclusive jurisdiction of public relations** – distinct domains of public relations expertise
2. **Public relations education** – the establishment of exclusive training schools
3. **Accreditation and Licensing** – Voluntary versus mandatory accreditation
4. **Importance of a code of ethics**
5. **Cultural diversity management**
6. **The effective role of the professional institute of public relations** (Abdullah, 2012)

The practice of public relations has, over the years, been given professional credibility by three main steps that have been taken – “the founding of the Public Relations Society of America [PRSA] in 1948, the process of professional accreditation begun in 1965, and what would appear to be a somewhat aborted effort to certify academic programs in public relations” (Hainsworth, 1993, p. 311-312). Within the profession and/or among academics, the enthusiasm for certification has been very little, even though the importance of the PRSA cannot be doubted and the significance of accreditation cannot be questioned. British professionals recognize that achieving proper professionalism cannot be done without a formal public relations education, and, therefore, have taken an important step. Those wishing membership in the United Kingdom’s equivalent to America’s PRSA – the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) – are now required to meet adequate academic and work qualifications (Hainsworth, 1993).

Public relations has been considered to be a tactical component of the promotional mix by many marketers, and this concept is contrary to the view of
practitioners within the field. They understand their actions as having more of a strategic and corporate impact (Lages & Simkin, 2003). In most cases, the public relations practice has been raised to the status of management. According to Wright (1979), “Public relations has a body of knowledge, a professional society, a code of ethics, a system for accreditation of practitioners by examination, a process for reporting violations, including reviewing and censuring, a Foundation furthering public relations research and education, specified curricula for study at the university level and a system of accreditation for these programs offering courses in PR” (p. 20-21).

**Education**

Over time, the profession of public relations has significantly transformed. According to Broom (2009), a majority of practitioners who entered the field in the early days had studied or worked in the field of journalism. In recent times however, there has been growth in the standardization and consistency in the way new practitioners entering the field are educationally prepared (Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010). After studying professionalism in Indian public relations and corporate communication, Gupta (2007) found that “professionals having educational qualifications in PR had broader and more strategic perspective of PR than those with qualification in mass communication or management. Those with a PR degree gave more importance to research, PR planning, defining of objectives measurement, and evaluation” (p. 311).

**Code of Ethics**

In 2000, the Public Relations Society of America updated its code of ethics (Sha, 2011). Some scholars have argued that it is both possible and feasible to have a universal code of ethics that can be used to guide and bind practitioners of public relations globally. The development of a binding code of ethics is not precluded by any
insoluble barriers. On the reverse side of this argument are scholars who argue against the possibility of a universal code of ethics, usually alluding to the inability of practitioners to effectively enforce a binding code with appropriate sanctions (Kruckerberg, 1993). After studying the dynamics of public relations and the drive for professionalism in the United Kingdom, Lages & Simkin (2003) found that many practitioners of the field do not consider the industry to have a clear standard of performance or code of ethics.

**Serving the Public Interest**

As public relations attempts to be transformed from a practice to a profession, a vital element it needs to consider in accomplishing this goal and being recognized by society as a legitimate profession, is clarifying its ethical obligation to serve the public interest (Bivins, 1993). Studies that measure professional orientation consider factors of social responsibility, and there are “indicators that professional status is one component in the model defining true social responsibility in public relations” (Wright, 1979, p. 21).

Even though this notion of serving the public interest is not one of the criteria commonly used in defining professionalism, it is frequently cited as one of the values of the construct. “Berhman (1988) cites among his ten characteristics of a profession ‘a dedication of the profession to social service . . . ‘ and ‘substitution of service for income and wealth as the primary motivation of members, plus high quality service regardless of fees received’” (Bivins, 1993, p. 117). Among Crable and Vibbert’s (1986), six characteristics of a profession, “group commitment to social responsibility” (p. 107) is listed as one. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) hold the belief that economic gain is not as important as serving others. Social responsibility and service to the public were cited by Cutlip et.al. (1985) (Bivins 1993). Therefore, public relations needs to demonstrate its
direct relevance to the public interest to be accepted as a profession (Niemann-Struweg & Meintjes, 2008).

**Autonomy**

The literature on characteristics of professions recognizes power and autonomy among the most significant, and defines autonomy as the capacity to act without intrusion from others. In contrast to being controlled by management, professionalism increases the power that public relations practitioners have to negotiate with management and carry out change (Serini, 1993).

**Professional Associations**

Professional associations play a very significant role in the growth and expansion of the public relations industry. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations and the Public Relations Consultants Associations are able to maintain professional credibility by requiring specific standards of practice from those desiring membership. These associations are also known to establish enterprises that promote professional standards in the rest of the industry (Lages & Simkin, 2003).

Although professional associations often serve as an indicator of a valid profession, their tendency to consist only of the elite caused Friedson to view them with skepticism. However, even with this inadequacy, he still acknowledges professional associations as proof of legitimacy of professionalism. Emile Drukheim, a French sociologist, was quoted by Friedson in the discussion of ethics because he stressed how important it was to establish an association that valued the joint interest of employers and employees (Molleda & Moreno, 2008).
Contextual Professionalism

As the profession of public relations is becoming more institutionalized, there is an increasing interest in understanding the patterns of behavior of the professional practices around the world (Moreno et al., 2010). Not only does public relations enjoy an accumulated set of standards by which its modern practice is guided, but in different parts of the world it has experienced several stages of progress. The features of the national environment and the labor conditions in which professionals are able to implement this strategic function both affect the increase or decrease of levels of professionalism in public relations and communication management. In each society, professionalism changes continuously, and the community determines its particular process of evolution. Friedson (1983) points out that the concept of professions needs to be considered as a historical construction for the purpose of advancement in theory building.

Professionalism has been one of the fundamental constructs of public relations scholarship for over four decades, but a lack of consensus as to what concepts or dimensions of the construct describe the profession still exists.

Many studies assessing professionalism in public relations since the 1970's have focused more on the professional orientation of practitioners (J. Grunig, 1976; Nayman, McKee, & Lattimore, 1977; Wright, 1979). Other scholars such as Beam (1990) and Serini (1993) have studied professionalism from the sociological perspective which goes beyond analysis on the individual level to analysis of occupational power relationships. Public relations in the United Kingdom was studied by Pieczka and L'Etang (2001) using this perspective. (Molleda & Moreno, 2008).
In different nations, according to Botan (1992), public relations is characterized by “different mixtures of national development, primary client, legal/political, and historical contexts” (p. 157). Culbertson and Chen (1992) distinguished between comparative public relations and international public relations. Comparative public relations has to do with identifying similarities and differences between public relations practice in one or more countries. Comparing the assumptions essential to the practice of each nation is a way to understand this. On the other hand, international public relations is focused on the international and cross-cultural context of public relations practice (Taylor & Kent, 1999). Such analyses have the ability to determine if the various assumptions guiding theories and practices in the Western countries are pertinent in other countries of the world (Park, 2013).

The international public relations perspective includes environmental or contextual research. Culbertson & Chen (1996) contended that domestically bound practices could be a result of generic principles, specific applications, and national idiosyncrasies – these have all been addressed in international public relations literature. The aim of the contextual perspective is to unfold public relations developments and practices within particular regions, countries or nations (Taylor, 2001; Vercic et al., 1996; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). Sharpe and Pritchard (2004), from a historical perspective, recognize the development of the following three factors as foundational in the evolution of public relations worldwide: 1) the acceptance of democratic principles globally 2) a rise in global interdependence and 3) advancement in communication technologies.
The Excellence Study, sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators, produced an assessment of normative variables or generic principles (J. Grunig, 1992). The significance of five contextual variables that have the potential to influence the practice of these normative variables or generic principles was explained by Vercic et al. (1996), and these include political-economic systems, culture, the extent of activism, the level of development, and the media system. After the relationship between public relations generic principles and the political, economic and cultural aspects of the practice in Slovenia were studied by Vercic et al., they came to the following conclusion: “The generic principles cannot be applied without strategic research to adjust them to different cultures and political systems. And they are extremely difficult to apply in a centralized, authoritarian, or totalitarian political-economic system in which propaganda, rather than two-way lateral communication, is used to instill awareness of constraints that disable the communication behavior of publics. If applied carefully and incrementally, however, the generic principles can change the political system and societal culture that make the application of the principles difficult” (p. 62).

According to Molleda and Moreno (2008), “comparative and country-specific studies offer strong evidence of the need for adaptation and identification of indigenous models and roles for the public relations practice responding to domestic realities” (p. 134). Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) explain that a democratic political structure in which public opinion and elections are used by competing groups to pursue legitimacy, is the general western definition of public relations. In many other parts of the world, however, this is not the norm. Emerging democracies where alternative perspectives may be
promoted in theory but not in practice are particularly difficult to discern, and this results in various forms of “covert and overt forms of self-, social, and government censorship” (p. 5).

The environmental approach has been an area of focus for a range of scholars, and the main contextual variables that influence the professional advancement of the public relations profession have also been defined by them. This approach was called “contextualized research” by Taylor (2001), and after providing a summary of representative studies, she determines, “The studies . . . have shown Western scholars how social, political, and economic contexts influence the practice of public relations. The contextualized research path offers both scholars and practitioners insight into the practice . . . in different nations and regions. Multiple challenges and opportunities exist for practitioners who will communicate with publics in these regions and the scholars who will explore public relations practices, education, and ethics” (p. 634).

According to Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) "identifying the impact of environmental variables on public relations practice helps increase our ability to predict which strategies and techniques are better suited to a particular organizational environment” (p. 1). The contextual variables that were formerly recognized by Vercic et al. (1996) were defined by Sriramesh and Vercic, and they shrunk these variables into the following three factors: A country’s infrastructure, a country’s societal culture, and a country’s media environment. Two aspects of a country’s infrastructure that are greatly interwoven are the socioeconomic and political aspects. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) explained that the reason economic development and political ideology are so closely linked is because in every country, the conditions of one affect the decision making of
the other. Consequently, they were able to make some assumptions with regards to the level of economic development in a country, and the repercussions it has for public relations. They assert that a larger quantity of organizational players and thus, an advanced level of competition among organizations are present the more developed an economy is. For this reason, strategic public relations usually prospers in developed countries. “These multiple suppliers of goods and services obviously need to compete for public attention, approval, and support. . . . [T] he level of economic development of a country directly affects variables such as poverty and illiteracy. These two potent variables have a direct impact on the strategies and techniques that public relations professionals may use in a country” (p. 6).

In the European Communication Monitor, the professional practice of public relations is approached from the theoretical perspective of new institutionalism (Sandhu, 2009; Tench, Verhoeven, & Zerfass, 2009) where institutions are defined as regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2008, p.48). In this perspective, public relations becomes more institutionalized until it finally becomes a condition for obtaining social legitimacy for activities of the organization.

Based on a global contextual perspective (Taylor, 2001) several studies have shown the contours of the public relations industry in varied geographical areas. These studies have contributed to describe the professional practice all over the world and to shape the debate about the context and the generic principles of public relations (Moreno et al., 2010).
Public Relations in Nigeria

Previous studies and literature on the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria are very limited. However, some scholars have traced the development of the profession since its preliminary stages more than one hundred and fifty years ago; examined some challenges facing the profession, and conducted some studies to gain more understanding of the current state of the profession in the country.

Public relations has been through five eras in Nigeria: The public enlightenment era (1859 to late 1930s), the broadcasting era (late 1930s), the political propaganda era (Late 1930s to mid-1940s), the public information era (1945 to early 1960s) and the professionalization era (early 1960s to late 2000s) respectively. Currently, the country is in the era of professionalizing public relations which is characterized by the “influx of well-educated and highly trained [public relations] practitioners,” and the “demand for highly skilled (full service) [public relations] firms” (Otubanjo, Amujo, & Melewar, 2009, p. 18). The beginning of this era brought the establishment of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) in 1963 and about thirty years later in 1990, it attained charter status (Nigerian Institute of Public Relations [NIPR], 1990). Shortly after, the NIPR was faced with the challenge of the lack of a well-designed and complete public relations body of knowledge for potential students, as well as specialized training programs for potential practitioners. The NIPR took on this challenge by designing certificate and diploma public relations programs, as well as training programs for students and practitioners respectively (Otubanjo et al., 2009). Although the attempt to fill this void created by the absence of a well-rounded public relations education in the country was a commendable effort by the NIPR, graduates are not likely to hold any role above the technician role (Amujo & Melewar, 2011). Nigerian practitioners are stuck on general
public relations practices while practitioners in advanced societies are specializing (Otubanjo et al., 2009). According to Otalor and Obisesan (2012), this misconception that public relations is all about writing and deploying press releases is the reason why so many people from different disciplines dabble into the field, not recognizing that media relations is only but a specialization of public relations. This extremely tactical practice of public relations could be as a result of the delayed emergence of original literature in the development of the profession in the country (Siramesh, 2009). In a study reported by Molleda and Alhassan (2006) on professional views of NIPR’s law and enforcement, respondents assert that coming to a consensus on the exact body of knowledge required by practitioners to practice efficiently and ethically is very vital. The professional recognition of public relations has been duly affected by the delayed entrance of a good curriculum into the country’s universities, polytechnics, and colleges, but could gradually evolve if conscious efforts are made to teach and use theoretical public relations (Amujo & Melewar, 2011).

Apart from the lack of a well-designed body of knowledge for public relations in Nigeria, some other challenges have been reported. According to Odubela (2007), unprofessional conduct and widespread dishonesty and exploitation are generally connected, and these are largely responsible for underdeveloped infrastructure, and most importantly embezzled public funds in the country. NIPR is a government funded institution, and due to the stated problem, the funds available for public relations practitioners to purchase tools for practice, or to implement efficient programs is limited and inadequate. Even practitioners that work within the government sphere pay more attention to censoring their actions and are not professionals at their jobs because of
the risks that come with playing against the government and its power. “Public relations in Nigeria is unable to get the necessary support needed to legitimize and professionalize the industry because the federal government is the biggest malefactor” (Odubela, 2007, p. 50).

Nevertheless, not only the government is to blame. NIPR has many problems with respect to leadership and law enforcement. No public relations practitioner can legally practice the profession without exclusively registering under NIPR with required qualifications, but the institute is unable to effectively monitor compliance with this law, or enforce other regulations in the public relations industry (Odubela, 2007). Even a process as minor as registration has been criticized by practitioners who have said the institute has been incapable of enforcing it. Lack of resources and incompetence of the NIPR are said to be responsible for the institute’s inability to put laws and regulations into effect (Molleda & Alhassan, 2006). The institute is “plagued with internal issues,” (Odubela, 2007, p. 49) and needs “better governance and management” (Molleda & Alhassan, 2006, p. 67).

Along with the NIPR’s inability to enforce laws and regulations, the management is not doing enough to ensure that the laws stay up to date. Practitioners have argued that the lack of comprehensiveness of the law does not allow it to embrace the developing nature of public relations, and this is a major weakness (Molleda & Alhassan, 2006). This could be responsible for the publics’ deficiency in knowledge of the professional standards of public relations, and therefore takes away any basis for which professional programs could be evaluated. The functions and roles of public
relations in the society are misunderstood, and active practitioners are perceived as emissaries of propaganda (Odubela, 2007).

Due to the confusion and misconception surrounding what public relations really is in the country, many organizations have taken extreme measures and eliminated public relations from their operations – either as a department functioning within the organization, or as an external consultancy or agency (Otalor & Obisesan, 2012).

Public relations in Nigeria is very old, and yet has not attained professional status over the years. There has already been some research outlining the factors responsible for the lack of growth and development of public relations in the country, and this research has been valuable in proving that public relations – although a well-recognized field in Nigeria – can still not be considered a profession. Therefore, research is needed to understand where public relations is on the journey to professionalism, and what measures can be taken to aid the process of moving towards standard professionalism of the field.

**Research Questions**

As a result of the focus of this study, all the research questions have been informed by the literature above and will include three main sections – Participant background information, organizational and occupational professionalism, and contextual professionalism. Questions in the first section – participant background information – seek to understand the background of the respondents, and measure variables that will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Questions in the second section, organizational and occupational professionalism, seek to identify what kind of professionalism, if any, public relations in Nigeria practices. Questions in the third section – contextual professionalism – seek to identify the various factors.
unique to the country that have an effect – positive or negative – on the professionalism of public relations in the country.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions, this thesis will use a qualitative method of research in the form of a case study and interviews. This section includes two major components – the explanation of a case study as an overarching research method, and the explanation of interviews as a component of the case study. In addition, the sampling methods and administration of data collection and analysis are also explained.

Method

A case study is a common qualitative method of research that attempts to thoroughly examine individuals, groups, organizations, or events using as many data sources as possible. When a researcher seeks to explain a phenomenon and gain some understanding about it, case studies are conducted (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). According to Babbie (2010), a case study “focuses attention on a single instance of some social phenomenon” (p. 309) and is commonly used “when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin.1989, p. 23).

This study employs the case study method of research because it seeks to expand and increase the knowledge of a topic that has not been adequately explored in the public relations field. Public relations in Nigeria has been studied from the perspective of lack of growth and development of the field, and a little bit on professionalism of the professionals in the field, but research and knowledge on the professionalism of the profession in the country is very limited.

Furthermore, a case study affords a researcher the ability to use multiple sources of data collection (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Therefore, the primary research method this study employs is the use of in-depth interviews. This study is seeking expert
knowledge from practitioners who have been in the profession for a while and likely experienced firsthand many of the issues that need to be addressed. According to Stacks (2011), interviews are used when the researcher identifies individuals who can significantly elaborate on the topic or problem being studied because of their knowledge. In-depth interviews are able to provide rich details, and enable the researcher to understand the interviewee’s real thoughts or experiences with regards to the topic or problem (Stacks, 2011). Another reason for the use of in-depth interviews as the primary research method is because they allow for an emergent design in data collection. Some themes that have not already been identified may become evident in this process.

**Sampling**

The method of sampling for participants was purposive sampling. According to Stacks (2011), purposive sampling is “a nonprobability sample in which individuals are deliberately selected for inclusion based on their special knowledge, position, characteristics, or relevant dimensions of the population” (Stacks, 2011, p. 344). Participants were carefully chosen from some of the most prominent organizations in the country, and they had to be currently practicing the profession. This eliminated responses that relied on experiences from the distant past, and focused more on the current state of the profession in Nigeria.

A conscious effort was made to recruit participants from various industries. Participants were also recruited from some of the largest and most prominent public and private companies and organizations in the country. Participants were all educated with a bachelor’s degree or higher, and had between five and 34 years of public relations experience. Fourteen of the participants were male and four were female. Thirteen out
of eighteen participants were members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), and five were not – without any immediate plans of gaining membership.

**Administration of Data Collection and Analysis**

Eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews, averaging 40 minutes each, were conducted in Nigeria from December 16\textsuperscript{th} 2013, to January 10\textsuperscript{th} 2014. One interview questionnaire was developed, and was be submitted to the Institutional review Board for approval. This questionnaire was developed as a guide only, and allowed for freedom in question development as the interview ensued. These semi-structured interviews enabled the free flow of conversation and the ability to receive valuable information that was not originally anticipated.

All in-depth interviews were conducted face to face. Administering the interviews in person eliminates the problem of not knowing who answered the questions, and how well they were answered. Face to face interviews also grant the interviewer the advantage of social cues that the interviewee may give, such as body language and voice intonation, and these can give the interviewer a lot of additional information. Also, because there is an absence of time delay between the researcher’s questions and the interviewee’s answers, they are able to respond quickly to each other’s comments (Opdenakker, 2006). The primary researcher and interviewer is Nigerian, and as a result had a tendency to be affected by interviewer bias. This was avoided as much as possible.

The interview questions were read to participants in generally the same sequence, and further questions were asked in each interview as the need arose. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in English by the researcher. Common themes and ideas were identified through a process of thorough analysis and careful
interpretation of responses. Supporting quotes have been inserted verbatim from research transcripts in the following chapter to support the findings. All respondents have remained completely anonymous, and have each been referred to simply as “a participant”.

Because this research employs the case study research method, textual analysis was also used as a method of data collection from various data points, including government information, social information, websites, blogs, media pieces, and books. Any form of data that was helpful in gaining a better understanding of the state of professionalism of public relations in Nigeria was accessed using textual analysis.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This chapter contains a thorough analysis of all participants’ responses, and has been divided into two main sections. The first section presents the findings on the background of participants of public relations in Nigeria. The following sections presents the findings on professionalism of public relations in Nigeria in relation to occupational professionalism, organizational professionalism, and the criteria of a profession. The final section presents the findings on the professionalism of public relations in Nigeria in relation to contextual professionalism.

Background of Participants

The majority of the participants had a degree in mass communications with a concentration in journalism (or theater). The minority had degrees in English, Accounting, Business Marketing, and History among others. Consequently, most of the participants began their careers in journalism, and then moved into public relations with time. Thirteen participants were members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, and five were not, without any immediate plans of getting registered. While the majority complained about the lack of effectiveness of the institute, few said it was doing well, and one participant was unrealistically positive about the NIPR making statements, which according to the research findings discussed in following sections, were inaccurate. The sample consisted of fourteen male participants and four female participants, and there was no significant difference in responses based on gender.

An effort to recruit participants from various public and private industries in the country resulted in acquiring of eight participants from government organizations, six from corporations, three from agencies, and one from an international company.
Participants who worked in agencies had a better-rounded idea about public relations duties and activities than any other participants.

**Occupational and Organizational Professionalism**

Occupational organization is characterized by several factors, one of them is the development of strong occupational identities and work cultures through collective systems of education. In Nigeria, systems of education for public relations are almost non-existent. One of the criteria of a profession, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is that it has a body of expert knowledge with a theoretical base acquired through an extended period of university training. Nigeria does not have this either. There is no formal curriculum for the study of public relations in colleges, polytechnics, or universities at the undergraduate level of education. One or two public relations courses are taught as part of the journalism concentration of mass communication at the undergraduate level. At the graduate level, only the University of Nigeria in Nsukka offers a graduate level public relations program.

One of the factors that both occupational and organizational professionalism have in common is increased occupational or career training. With regards to occupational or career training internally by the organization or externally by other public relations training outfits, the majority of respondents said that there was no concrete training provided by their organizations for public relations professionals. Most of the training that practitioners go through is done externally through workshops and courses, and for some practitioners, their organizations bear the economic burden. Some of this training is done in the country while some is international. NIPR runs some periodic workshops and training courses that practitioners attend, but these do not seem to be mandatory for members. Respondents did clarify that they have to identify training
opportunities on their own and then present them before the organization, which will then approve them and in some cases, pay for them. The only training or orientation that organizations typically provide has to do with the industry in which they operate. According to a participant in government,

> What we do is, every year NIPR organizes workshops and all that, so we participate in those workshops. We also try to get overseas training – sort of refresher courses overseas; mostly in the UK. But I’ve only been to one of those trainings in Chicago. The rest of the trainings or workshops are in the UK. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, December 16, 2013).

Another characteristic of occupational professionalism, as well as one criterion of professionalism, is practitioner autonomy and voluntary valuation and decision-making in difficult cases. On another hand, hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making that are one characteristic of organizational professionalism. All participants acknowledged that in their respective organizations, they are subject to higher authority. They typically do not have autonomy or independence and are usually not in charge of making the difficult decisions. Participants said that most organizations do not really understand the value public relations adds to their success, and, therefore, only appreciate it in times of crisis. As a result, not all public relations practitioners are made a part of the organizational decision-making process. Even decisions that are made by practitioners have to be approved by higher authority. Some practitioners that are part of this process are able to render valid inputs while others are just present at management meetings without the opportunity to present valuable ideas. Some participants admitted that they were not part of the major decision-making process, and one participant actually said that decision-making was not the duty of a public relations professional, but communicating the already made decisions to various publics and stakeholders was.
Codes of ethics are an essential criterion of a profession, and an additional characteristic of occupational professionalism has to do with associations and institutions monitoring professional ethics. According to all participants, codes of ethics specific to the practice of public relations in their respective organizations do not exist. There is usually a general ethics code that is binding on all employees of the organization regardless of the department in which they work, and that is the only ethics code binding for public relations practitioners in an organization. Usually, the ethics of the profession are left to the discretion of the professional carrying out the duties within that organization. NIPR has what it refers to as an Ethics Code, which was established to guide the practice of public relations in the country. Some participants mentioned that they, as members of the institute of public relations, are bound by the code of ethics of the institute, but that binding is on them as individuals, as opposed to the whole public relations department of the organization. One participant in the private sector said,

As an organization, we have codes of ethics; we have codes of conduct. It might not be identified as the public relations code of conduct, but for your position, you know the ethics that govern what you are doing. But as a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, I am under the directives of the NIPR to go with the codes of conduct. As a member of this company, I also have to keep to the code of conduct or behavior of workers in this company, the do’s and the don’ts. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 8, 2014).

NIPR has not been able to effectively monitor the profession enough to ensure effective execution of the codes of ethics by practitioners in their practice. It does not have the capacity to keep tabs on all professionals and ensure that those breaking the codes of ethics are reprimanded accordingly.

Public relations was defined by most participants in terms of image or reputation and crisis management. Just a few people mentioned relationship management. When
internal and external publics were mentioned, it was all terms of information flow and management. For the majority of participants, public relations was all about ensuring that the company had a good image and reputation, and that goodwill was maintained with the public. A participant in the public sector said:

Public relations is about creation of good image for your audience or for your organization through communication; simple and sustainable communication for both the internal and external public. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 7, 2014)

The main functions performed by public relations professionals in Nigeria as identified by most participants, are media relations, crisis management and stakeholder relations. Community relations, investor relations, and corporate social responsibility were all mentioned by a few respondents, but for the majority, media relations was the foundation of public relations, and crisis management, and stakeholder management were some additional responsibilities. Practitioner duties were defined in terms of writing news releases, monitoring news coverage about their organizations, and making sure that the public saw their organizations in a good light. According to most participants, the duties of a public relations practitioner are centered on effective communication to the public using the media. According to one participant in government,

Well, my work is probably concentrated on media relations, which is a branch of PR, or possibly the major part of PR. The other is stakeholder engagement. We do a lot of stakeholder engagement but we have also, not to distract from our media work, created some sort of a unit that handles purely stakeholder engagement. We concentrate on the media aspect. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, December 16, 2013)

Organizational professionalism is characterized by several requirements, and one of them is regulation and accountability through externalized forms. Having an active professional association is also one criterion of a profession. NIPR was established as an act of the parliament to regulate public relations practice in Nigeria,
and hold all public relations practitioners accountable. The institute requires all persons aspiring to be public relations professionals to be registered with the institute and certified by examination at all levels before they can legally practice. Participants have said that the reason this law exists is to regulate the practice of the profession, and to maintain professionalism. However, the institute has not been able to enforce this law. Many public relations practitioners seem to be practicing the profession just fine without this membership or certification. One participant in the private sector said,

> But one area we have not done well in as the institute, is the area of ensuring that we stop people from practicing illegally… The institute has also not done enough to prosecute people. We have done little in prosecuting people, so indirectly we are encouraging people to practice without being registered. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, December 18, 2013).

Organizational professionalism can be achieved through the certification of workers/practitioners/employees. NIPR does this, and therefore is an active institute. However, its major shortcoming is its ability to enforce the laws it has put in place, and effectively monitor the profession in organizations in the country. Organizations do not seem to require the NIPR certification from public relations practitioners. Membership of, and a certificate from the institute are listed as “an additional advantage” for prospective employees. Only two participants – one from an agency and one from a private company – identified this membership as mandatory in their organizations. Most organizations had no specific requirements for public relations practice. The essential certification was a minimum level of education – a bachelor’s degree – in certain majors which included mass communication, theater, and English. Some participants did mention that there is a tendency for organizations to hire anyone as a public relations professional regardless of their field of study in academia. Not much value is placed on
the academic qualifications one has. According to most participants, organizations do not have a well-rounded understanding or appreciation for the profession of public relations. However, they have said that this understanding and appreciation is only growing in recent times, and will continue to grow. A participant in the public sector responded,

You have to do related courses; mass communication, public relations, maybe advertising. But I do know that there are some companies that will even go for an English graduate. I think the best thing is to have an experience, a vast experience, in public relations irrespective of your academic qualification. What most organizations look for in Nigeria - those who proudly have had experience in public relations firms, or media. Basically, [Certification by the NIPR] is usually an added advantage because if you belong to NIPR that means you are the professional they are looking for. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 7, 2014)

Managerialism is another characteristic of organizational professionalism. Most public relations practitioners in Nigeria are in positions of management over their departments. However, these departments are rarely called “Public Relations Departments.” They are usually called “Corporate Services,” “Corporate Communication,” “Corporate Affairs,” “Public Affairs,” and “Public Communication.” Consequently, the title of public relations practitioner is attached to whatever the department is called. For instance, if the department in an organization is called “Corporate Communications”, then the title attached would be “Head of Corporate Communications”. Practitioners have given two main reasons for this. The first is that it could just be nomenclature, and that these are trendy names to call the public relations department. The second, as described by practitioners, is the limiting nature of the terms “public relations” with regards to the scope of the field and the duties performed. Practitioners who have identified the second reason as dominant, claim that public relations scope and duties are limited, and that making the profession part of a larger
department that incorporates some more duties of organizational communication gives it more value – especially for organizations and companies. According to a participant in the public sector,

I think the words ‘public relations’ seem to limit what you can do. For example, if you say corporate affairs, as a corporate affairs person, there are certain things that you can do that are administrative or HR in nature. There are some things that you can do that are more like corporate services duties. There are things that you can also do that are advertising in nature. You know public relations is quite different from advertising. So it’s kind of limiting using the words ‘public relations.’ That is why most organizations use corporate communications, public affairs, etc. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 7, 2014)

Even though practitioners have asserted that public relations should be a management function, and some have even defined it as such, they have expressed that there is a challenge of rising in power and position in organizations, as they can only go as far as general management positions; not any higher. This has been described as a “ceiling of power” they have been unable to break through for the past couple of years.

**Contextual Professionalism**

When asked how public relations practice in Nigeria compares to public relations practice in western countries, or globally, the responders were almost evenly split. While some believe that practice of the profession in Nigeria compares favorably to the practice in other parts of the world, others believe that it is still far behind. Regardless of these deferring underlying opinions, all the participants agreed on one thing – public relations in Nigeria faces many more challenges than public relations in western countries, and in most other parts of the world.

Public relations in Nigeria is synonymously associated with bribery, or what is called ‘the brown envelope,’ which just means that money has illegally exchanged
hands for a purpose. Some participants perceive this to be an issue and call it a challenge to the profession. They also admitted that many of them shy away from direct identification with the term “public relations” because of this negative connotation. Many organizations do not even honor parts of their budgets that are tagged “public relations” because of the belief that they money will be used for less than legal purposes. Due to this, many public relations departments and practitioners are suffering from insufficient funding. One participant in (insert Affiliation) said,

I also think its because the word public relations has been bastardized, so to say. It has a negative connotation sometimes, and corporate organizations don’t want to be associated with it. If you hear the word PR, it connotes giving gifts, giving bribes. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 9, 2014)

Other participants have argued that this association of public relations with the “brown envelope” is not necessarily a negative thing if you look at it from the perspective of culture. The Nigerian culture, as argued by some participants, is naturally an appreciative culture, and therefore, appreciating someone when they have done something for you can barely be seen as bribe. One participant in the public sector argued this perspective:

If you look at the African culture for instance, we have a culture of hospitality. Sometimes it gets confusing to a public relations practitioner where to draw the line. It is expected that when you visit somebody, they will definitely give you water to drink, give you food to eat. In certain times you do that, and it may be interpreted as brown envelopes. So it’s a challenge to be able to separate the two. We have a culture that appreciates. Sometimes, if somebody does something good to you, there’s always an appreciation. That is part of the culture. But there has to be a line between appreciation and using that to change behavior or perception. So there is a middle point. The intention is very important. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, January 7, 2014)
In addition to this issue of public relations’ synonymous association with bribe, participants also identified other factors in the Nigerian environment that are responsible for negatively affecting public relations and, consequently, leading to the deficiency in growth and development of the profession. Because the function of the public relations professional is viewed mostly from the perspective of media relations, when organizations are looking to hire practitioners, they look to successful journalists first because they are well connected in the media. As a result, the profession is placed in the hands of people who are unqualified to effectively handle issues that arise.

Inadequate technology and infrastructure, a lack of an appropriate educational curriculum, lack of training, lack of sufficient funds, lack of professionalism, propaganda by government, lack of appreciation for what public relations really is, and unrealistic expectations, among others were identified by some participants. A participant in an agency in the private sector mentioned a few.

Government public relations is mostly propaganda in our country . . . You see government PR people trying to package government even when wrong has been done. They still want to tell you no, this is the right thing we are doing. That is bad for PR practice . . . Economically, if the money is not there, if we don’t have enough funds, there are things that we should do that we will not be able to do . . . Poor training. If people do not submit themselves to training, if you employ people and don’t train them, they won’t do well for you. Another one is the issue of nepotism where people employ people based on friendship, based on family ties and what have you. When you look at all of this, it will affect the practice. (In-depth Interview, Nigeria, December 18, 2013)

A few participants completely disagreed with the notion that there is a deficiency in growth and development of the profession. According to these few, public relations in Nigeria is gradually growing and gaining acceptance by everyone. They do maintain the argument that growth progress is slow as a result of many of the factors listed above,
but they believe that there has been some evolution in the profession, and that it will continue in the years to come.

With regards to governmental factors, about half of the participants said that as opposed to the government affecting public relations practice or public relations as a profession, public relations instead influences government. The government’s acceptance and use of the profession is growing, and with time this will influence other sectors of society. Others have argued that the government does not portray positive leadership and although NIPR came to existence as an act of the parliament, the government itself does not take the laws of the governing body into consideration when employing the use of public relations. Consequently, the society can only be a reflection of its leadership, and this lack of adherence to the legal demands of NIPR does not aid the advancement of the profession.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This final chapter includes five sections, which discuss the interpretations of research findings in Chapter 4, the implications of these findings and interpretations for the practice of the profession of public relations in Nigeria, the implications for theory building, the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research based on findings.

Interpretations

From the research findings, it can be concluded that public relations in Nigeria is neither fully occupationally professional nor organizationally professional. It is just a little bit of both. In addition, the profession does not meet the appropriate criteria of a profession.

There are only two characteristics of public relations in Nigeria that make it occupationally professional – the discourse is constructed within a professional group – the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) – and public relations practitioners have control over their work, and most of the practices left to their discretion. Organizational professionalism requires that there be standardized procedures of the profession. NIPR was established as an act of parliament for that purpose – to standardize the profession through regulation of the practice in the country. However, it has not been very successful in fulfilling this purpose. It has laws that can serve as foundations in advancing the profession and maintaining a certain minimum level of professionalism, but the inability enforce these laws remains. Although NIPR requires everyone who practices the profession to be a member of the institute and to be certified by it, this is most often not the case. Organizations hire people who do not have this certification.
Even the government who established this body hires people without certification from NIPR to practice public relations.

Majority of the participants who believe that the NIPR is doing well as an institute are members. They are able to understand the value that being an active member of the NIPR brings. Those who were not members, apart from recognizing that the institute is not irrelevant, did not really understand what it has to offer. Interestingly, regardless of NIPR membership, the general fundamental ideas, understanding, and perceptions of the profession by practitioners was the same across the board. There was no higher level of thought or understanding derived from those that were members of the institute. However, practitioners that worked for consultancies had a broader scope of the profession than those that worked in the government or corporate sector.

Members of NIPR are certified by examinations given by the institute. Although a lot of practitioners have been certified by the institute, majority have no prior educational or academic background in public relations. Over three fourths of the sample population have their undergraduate or graduate degrees in mass communication with a journalism concentration, and kicked off their careers in journalism before becoming public relations practitioners. Therefore, the only sources of theoretical public relations knowledge they have are one or two public relations classes in the journalism degree, and courses by NIPR for examination and certification purposes. This must be the foundation of the perception that public relations is all about the media. It seems that most of the practitioners have experience limited to the media, or media relations. Whether the courses offered by NIPR are more media centered is not completely known, but a course that is a couple of months long cannot offer the same foundational
requirements of a profession as a four-year degree. The institute does organize trainings and workshops periodically for all members, but a strong educational background in public relations is lacking. This lack of an educational background for many professionals could be attributed to the fact that in the Nigerian education system, there is really no public relations curriculum. No university in Nigeria has a full public relations curriculum where public relations is a concentration in the mass communications major. What they typically have is a few courses that are embedded in the journalism major. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, is the only university in the country with a graduate degree in public relations. This may be the primary reason why organizations do not have standard requirements for public relations practitioners and therefore employ people from all educational backgrounds, and especially from journalism. Consequently, an extensive system of education is another requirement for occupational professionalism that public relations in Nigeria does not satisfy.

That practitioners express their main duties mainly in terms of media relations and reputation or image management makes it obvious that many other specializations of public relations such as government relations, investor relations, and community relations are either unexplored by organizations, practitioners and NIPR, or are performed by persons other than the public relations professional. If the former is the case, it means that there is just no knowledge of these areas among those who practice the profession, and if the latter is the case, then it means that various specializations of public relations are being practiced by people who may not be well equipped to practice them. One criterion of a profession is a body of expert knowledge. If the body of
knowledge of public relations in Nigeria is limited, it cannot be considered expert, and therefore, there profession cannot be considered professional based on this criterion.

One characteristic of public relations in Nigeria that qualifies it to be organizationally professional is the hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making. As the findings proved, public relations practitioners are subject to higher levels of authority in their organizations, and while some are part of the difficult decision-making process of organizations, others are excluded from the process. Regardless, all practitioners hold management positions, and many participants stated that public relations should, in fact, be a management function. However, they also stated that organizations have yet to fully understand the value of public relations in organizations, and only appreciate it when there is some form of crisis. This begs the question of why then, public relations practitioners are managers if they are not exactly valued in their organizations. It can be concluded that the reason for this is because practitioners are usually managers of departments that are not called “public relations” departments.

Participants have said that the term “public relations” is restrictive and limiting with regards to the scope of roles that can be performed. This means that practitioners are managers of departments that perform other duties asides from public relations duties, and this is what qualifies them to be managers. So although public relations practitioners are typically managers in their organizations, they still do not fit into the managerialism characteristic of organizational professionalism.

Another characteristic of occupational professionalism that the public relations practice in Nigeria fails to embody is practitioner trust by both clients and employers. That public relations is synonymously associated with bribery or the “brown envelope” is
enough to rule out this characteristic. Organizations are weary of public relations budgets and activities that involve money because they believe that the money will be used inappropriately as inducements. That is a lack of trust. In addition, this issue of public relations’ synonymous association with bribery or the “brown envelope” in Nigeria is an ethical issue. All practitioners stated that their individual organizations had no codes of ethics specific to the practice of public relations, and a few practitioners mentioned that as opposed to their organizational communications departments being subject to the NIPR codes of ethics, only they as individual are bound by those external codes. The institute should be able to effectively monitor practitioners’ adherence to its codes of ethics, especially those of them that are members, but even this it has been unable to accomplish. The aforementioned, therefore, rules out another characteristic of occupational professionalism – professional ethics monitored by institutions or associations. By this characteristic, public relations in Nigeria cannot be considered professional.

Collegial authority is one more characteristic of occupational professionalism, and rational-legal forms of authority is one of organizational professionalism. The authority of public relations practitioners in Nigeria is neither collegiate nor rational-legal. As a matter of fact, there is no standard authority of public relations practice or practitioners in Nigeria. As has already been said, public relations practitioners are subject to higher authorities within their organizations, and are hardly subject to the laws or codes of ethics of NIPR.

In conclusion, findings have proven that the public relations profession in Nigeria cannot be considered professional in the state in which it currently exists.
Implications for the Practice

The findings of this research exude some very significant issues that are preventing public relations in Nigeria from becoming a profession according to global standards of professionalism. These issues are very prominent in the practice among practitioners, organizations, and even the NIPR, and until they are effectively handled, the professionalism of public relations in the country will be at stake. There are two main things that can be done to improve public relations professionalism in Nigeria – the NIPR becoming more effective, and the government forming a standard public relations curriculum for education at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The first immediate step to moving towards a more professional public relations industry in Nigeria will be the NIPR becoming a strong and authoritative organization that is well recognized in the country, and enforcing its rules on all practitioners and organizations.

The NIPR is the one and only regulating body of public relations in Nigeria, and so far it has not done a very good job of enforcing rules and holding practitioners – members and non-members alike – accountable for their actions. Practitioners need to know and understand the value of the institute, the codes of ethics of the institute, and the repercussions for failing to abide by any NIPR laws. The NIPR gaining complete control of the profession would help to separate it from the negative ideas that is has been attached to. This way,

The second step to making public relations more professional in Nigeria is the ministry of education establishing a full curriculum for the study of public relations at the undergraduate and graduate levels. If public relations is going to be recognized and appreciated by organizations and the public at large, there needs to be some kind
foundational educational system, apart from the courses that NIPR offers, that adequately prepares practitioners for practice in various sectors. Having a few classes through the journalism major and the NIPR is not enough to equip public relations professionals for professional practice.

Most of the issues that public relations professionalism faces in Nigeria can be addressed by the above suggestions. If the NIPR is able to become solider and more authoritative, then all practitioners would be registered and certified before they can practice. Furthermore, the association of public relations with bribery and the “brown envelope” will gradually diminish because the codes of ethics of the NIPR will be enforced. This will restore trust in organizations and clients alike. If a curriculum of study is established for public relations then organizations can focus on hiring the qualified people to handle their public relations activities. Also, there will be a broader scope of the profession and it will be appreciated more. Maybe then, public relations practitioners will be able to hold management positions as public relations practitioners instead of in conjunction with other duties or departments.

Implication for Theory Building

As was stated in Chapter 1, there is no theory for international public relations as theory building is still underway. However, Culbertson and Chen’s (1996) comparative public relations was used as a basis for this research study. This study has elaborated on the state of public relations as a profession in Nigeria.

Findings of the study were very useful in identifying general factors of public relations professionalism that are unique to the Nigerian environment such as public relations’ synonymous association with bribery, lack of insufficient funds for effective practice, a professional association that is active but not effective, the lack of an
appropriate curriculum of study. These issues definitely shed some light on what public relations practice is like locally in Nigeria in comparison to other countries, and this is what comparative public relations seeks to do. These findings can be used to further theory building in international public relations practice.

**Limitations of the Study**

Rich data was found in the as a result of this research study, but there are some limitations to it.

First of all, although participants were from various sectors and industries in the Nigerian workforce, all participants but one were from government agencies, or locally owned companies, organizations or consultancies. Attempts made to recruit participants from multinational and transnational companies deemed difficult and unsuccessful, and practitioners from this field may have a slightly different perspective, and this may affect results.

Secondly, because this was a qualitative study and the sample size was not large, the results can hardly be generalized to other African countries, regardless of the fact that Nigeria is the most populated one.

**Future Research**

Future research studies should be done on the NIPR to understand the underlying issues for its lack of adequacy in standardization of the profession and practice of public relations, and what can be done to solve this issue.

Future research can also be done in other countries that regulate the practice of public relations to understand if they have some of the same or similar issues that Nigeria has, steps they have taken to solve these issues, and whether these steps were favorable or not. This research could be extended to countries that do not regulate the
practice of the profession to understand why they do not, and how they maintain a professional status of public relations.

Finally, future research can be done in all of these countries to see what factors affecting professionalism are similar, which ones are different, and what solutions can be implemented towards ensuring that public relations becomes more professional globally.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1 – Participant background information
1. How many years of public relations experience have you had?

2. Do you have any qualifications, certifications, or awards for your public relations practice?
   a. If yes, how many? From whom?

3. Are you a member of the NIPR?
   a. If yes, how many years is your membership? To what level of membership do you belong?
   b. If no, do you plan on becoming a member of the NIPR? Why or why not?

4. In what areas have you worked? In what area are you currently working?

5. Do you have an undergraduate or graduate public relations degree?
   a. If yes, from where?
   b. If no, what degree(s) do you have? And how did you end up in public relations?

6. Did you receive any formal training by your organization, the NIPR, or any other organizations for effective public relations practice?
   a. If yes, how valuable was this training?

Section 2 – Organizational or Occupational professionalism
1. How would you define public relations?

2. Do you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession? Why?

3. What positions do public relations practitioners typically hold within an
organization?

4. What kind of duties do public relations practitioners in the country or your organization perform?

5. Is public relations in your organization a department or an individual? Why?

6. What is the role of public relations in your organization?

7. Are public relations practices or practitioners in your organization subject to any higher authority within or outside the organization?

8. In what ways does public relations in your organization serve clients? The public?

9. Are there any internal or external rules or regulations that guide the practice of public relations in your organization?

10. What are your organizational requirements for public relations practice or practitioners?

11. Is there a training process for public relations practitioners in your organization?
   a. If yes, is this internal or external? If external, by whom?
   b. What do these training processes entail?

12. Are public relations practitioners in your organization required to have any kind of certification?
   a. If yes, what kind? By whom?
   b. If no, why?

13. What department in your organization is responsible for making the difficult decisions?
Section 3 – Contextual professionalism

1. How do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries? Globally?

2. What factors (such as culture, tradition, etc.) in the Nigerian environment affect (positively or negatively) the practice of public relations?

3. What are some factors responsible for the lack of growth and development of public relations in the country?

4. In what ways does the government or politics affect the practice of public relations?

5. In what context(s) is public relations most commonly used in the country? Political, social, or economic? Why?
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

PARTICIPANT 1

Sir, can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you have had?

PR itself is, let’s see, about 14 years. It will be 14 years in January.

Do you have any qualifications, certifications or awards for your public relations practice?

Qualifications; well yeah, the first one is a Journalism degree. When I did my initial diploma in journalism we studied journalism, print and public relations, before I took my mass comm degree. So that’s mostly the only training I received. I practiced in the media for quite a long time before switching to PR.

Oh okay. So are you a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations?

Yes.

Okay. And what level?

Well just a member. I’m not an active member so to say.

How many years is your membership?

They harassed me, so I finally joined them probably about 6 years ago.

Oh okay. What do you mean they “harassed” you?

They just thought I should be a member. You know, public relations in Nigeria at a point got bastardized. It is regarded now that PR is a euphemism for bribe, or the “brown envelope.” So because of that I tended not to participate. But one of their late presidents insisted that I must join. He was more or less instrumental for my joining.

In what areas have you worked in the past? I know you mentioned media. Did you work in Journalism as well?

Well, we consider it the media. In the media we have two branches more or less – print and electronic. So I’m a print person. I’m not an electronic person.

So what’s your current area of work right now?

We prefer here, to call it public affairs or public communication, but the general terminology is public relations.
Okay. So can you kind of give me an idea of what you do?

Well, my work is probably concentrated on media relations, which is a branch of PR, or possibly the major part of PR. The other is stakeholder engagement. We do a lot of stakeholder engagement but we have also, not to distract from our media work, created some sort of a unit that handles purely stakeholder engagement. We concentrate on the media aspect.

Ok. So I was going to ask if you got an undergraduate or graduate degree in public relations, but you said you got it in communications, right?

Yes, yes.

So how did you end up in public relations?

Well they called me and asked if I could join them.

They meaning the NIPR?

No, no. I mean this organization. I was writing for a magazine then, and at that time we were doing a lot of work, and I think Zambia was doing their privatization program and I was reporting a lot of it. So they thought they needed somebody with, apart from privatization experience, some crisis communication experience. So they called me. I was then based in the U.S. I thought about the relocation, and they reassured me that it wouldn't be a problem, so I joined them.

So can you tell me other areas you have had some experience in? You've mentioned media, stakeholder engagement, crisis communication. Any other areas you've had some experience?

As we talk I will probably remember more. But when I was in the U.S I also worked in the prison, but that is a little bit off PR. I did what they call case management. They just send the prisoners to you, you review their backgrounds in terms of qualifications, and then help recommend or assist in helping them get a job based on either their educational background or family background. So that is the other area in which I have worked other than media.

Alright. So did you get any formal training by this organization?

Well, formal, I don't know if you could classify that as formal. What we do is, every year, NIPR organizes workshops and all that, so we participate in those workshops. We also try to get overseas training – sort of refresher courses overseas; mostly in the UK. But I've only been to one of those trainings in Chicago. The rest of the trainings or workshops are in the UK.

So the NIPR does organize some workshops?
Yeah, they do.

How often? Just annually?

Well it’s several times a year. You just decide on which ones you want to attend.

So it’s not mandatory to attend all of them.

No, no.

How valuable do you think this training is?

Very. Very. You know some of us are not strictly PR people because of public decouotation. We see ourselves more as communications people. That is why at a point stakeholder engagement was a lot of distraction. I then had to speak with my boss about creating a unit that would do that, especially the national assembly engagement. We also had to hire a labor advisor that would handle stakeholder engagement with labor. So that helped us concentrate on the media communication, or media relations aspect. We still do other stakeholder engagement, but that is not strictly what we do now. It’s probably less than 10% of our assignment.

So can you describe to me the departments? Do you have a public relations department or public communications department, and then within that department you have like…?

We have media relations, we have stakeholder relations. At a point there was one unit we called the issues management unit, and that is the meeting we hold every Monday morning by 9:00 without failure. No matter what happens, the management must meet every Monday morning at 9 to look at issues affecting the organization especially as regards media and we will review the media for the rest of the week, and see what issues are raised and how we are going to respond to them. There is also a small task force, more like the crisis communications task force, that comes in if we need quick responses. We used to call it the quick response team, but we just decided we’ll call it crisis communications team. Those are just the few units we have.

Ok. So how would you define public relations?

Public relations in our case is, as we tell people, to enhance continuously the image of our organization in the public, especially our key stakeholders. But the job we do makes the entire country our stakeholders because what we are selling belongs to every Nigerian. We handle what we call the federal budget, which belongs to everybody, not just the federal government. It belongs to the three tiers of government. So when you are selling them, at
the end of it, you send the money to consolidated revenue funds, and that means that the revenue from it will be shared equally to everybody. So you are not going to say that the investor is just your stakeholder. No. Every Nigerian is a stakeholder because no matter how little it is, they have a share in that asset. But apart from every Nigerian being a stakeholder, we still have key stakeholders that we deal with – like labor, enterprise managers – those who are managing those enterprises that you are going to privatize, we have to deal with investors, all kinds of segmented stakeholders. But not withstanding, you still consider the entire country your stakeholder.

So would you consider the field of public relations to be an occupation or a profession and why?

I prefer to see it as a profession. Because an occupation is something that, the way it is now, if you can do it fine. But I also think its something that one should get people who studied public relations to engage in it. No matter how small. If they didn’t study it and they feel like they want to professionalize it, they can take courses to professionalize themselves. But I think it should be professional. When you say occupation, I tend to see it as something that you can dabble in and dabble out.

So public relations is sort of a more stable long term kind of industry?

That’s what I like to see it as.

Okay. So what positions do public relations practitioners typically hold within an organization? Maybe an executive position, a management position…

It is usually a management position. But you know the funny thing? Until recently, not many organizations have taken it to the directorate level, so in many cases, they (PR practitioners) don’t aspire to become the head of the agency. It’s like there is a ceiling of where you can get to. So if you want to go beyond head of public relations, then you have to move out of that line to get to other places, or to be the directorate of one of the directorates. Other than that, there is this iron ceiling and you can’t break it. So you can’t rise beyond that level.

What is the reason for that? Is it because there is no greater appreciation for public relations?

I think so. When Soludo was governor of CBN, we talked about it. We more or less laughed over that, but he said they were going to do better than that. And they did better, now CBN has that directorate, and a few other organizations have a directorate of public communications in their agencies. But we can do better. Unfortunately, NIPR is doing enough to push for that to happen. So I think that if they can push for that to happen, every agency must have that directorate.
So from the way you are describing it, it sounds like its a growing field; like more and more organizations are appreciating it.

Yes. Some people are appreciating it more. In most cases, chief executives only appreciate the work of PR when there is crisis in an organization. If not, when they need to deliver bribes to somebody, they give it to the PR man to go and deliver. But I think in most organizations, the practitioners are gradually stamping their authority that this profession is not about bribe giving, brown envelopes and all that. I remember those days when I was a little tough when I joined this organization, I told them that we are not going to give money to the journalists covering us. What we have done is to get the reporters on the bid. Whatever advertisements we are placing, we give to them. They go their agencies and get the commission, but for us to put money in envelopes and give them, we are not going to do that. It’s better because it is a legitimate way of making their income. Every media house all over the world gives commissions if you place advertisement. So you can come to the agency, place the advertisement, and collect the commission, but we are not going to give you cash. You make your own money. They grumbled over it because they are used to after every assignment, people calling them by the side and giving them some money. I told them it wouldn’t happen here. I also think you should also earn your respect – that you are doing a story because it is worth doing, not because I am paying you to do the story.

So are there any other roles of public relations within this organization? I know we mentioned media relations, crisis management, stakeholder engagement, and communication. Are there any other duties that PR professionals in your organizations perform apart from these?

Well we are in the management, so apart from those specific areas, we participate in the management and we participate in decision taking – what we call the transaction forum and the management committee meeting. We are active members of those two. As a matter of fact, the issues management meeting that I told you we hold every Monday is probably the most stable meeting in this organization for the past 14 years. It is one meeting that no matter what happens, except if there is a holiday on Monday, it must hold. Because of that, some issues that need to go to management committee are sometimes held before or after the meeting because we are not quite guaranteed when the next management committee meeting will hold. Far-reaching decisions are taken in that meeting, so we’ve tried to move PR to be more a less a focal point in the organization. People complain that why is it only your meeting that the DG is always running to hold every Monday? I told them look, whatever you are in the organization, if your boss says your going to be bad, then no matter what you do, you’re bad. If your boss thinks you’re good, no matter what you do, you’re good. Yeah, so at least for the first few years, the successful DG’s – we have been able to convince them that this is very important. But subsequent DG’s
when they come, believe it is the most important meeting in the organization. So that has given us a little bit of a lift that this is a unit to contend with.

So what’s the DG?

The Director General.

So is public relations in this organization, or public relations practitioners within this organization subject to higher authority than just the public relations management?

Are we subjected to higher authority in terms of NIPR?

Whether NIPR or authorities within the organization.

We report directly to the director general, and even beyond that, we report to the vice president through the director general. There are issues that will arise that will require our attention. So if anything we have to communicate to the vice president because the vice president is the chairman of our council. So this organization reports to council. For instance there was a time when Obasanjo was president, one of the ministers complained that I was using abusive language, and then Obasanjo called that I should go and apologize to the woman. My boss said no, I am not going to apologize; that if the president wants him – the director general – to apologize, he will apologize, but I wont apologize because he believed that what I said was right. For a little while the president kept insisting that I must apologize, but luckily enough at a point it was out of his radar, and the case closed.

Alright. So I know you talked about stakeholders, and the whole Nigerian people being stakeholders in their individual ways. But in what ways does the public relations department in your organization serve the clients?

Well first of all, we have transaction departments. But we place the advertisements calling for investors to express interest in the transactions. So they assume that because we place the advertisements, all the information about the enterprise will be with us. So we are the focal point. Therefore what we’ve done is gotten the transaction advisers to work with us to make sure that we upload every single thing that investors will need on our website. The other thing is, when we are doing transactions, there is what we call the virtual data room that we created. The usual data room when you are doing transactions is a physical location. You get all the documents about that transaction, you look through them, and make your decision if you want to invest or not. Because we have investors coming from overseas, its cheaper for them to stay in their offices and go through what we call virtual data rooms. Its like a website, but we upload everything about that particular transaction on that website. The documents cannot be downloaded – they are blocked. The ones that are
downloadable, you allow them to download. But let them look at it before they can make a decision if they want to travel all the way from say the United States to come to the enterprise to do physical due diligence. If they look at them and they are not convinced, they can just decide “I am not coming.” So we’ve been able to get that done, and for the past few years that has been working. People prefer the virtual data room to making a trip of thousands of miles to come and maybe spend a few hours on the table to look at the documents. In the case of labor, though we have a labor advisor, we also have what we call neighbor to neighbor. I was surprised when one of the campaigns started using that acronym to describe their own… what we were doing is that, if we have privatized this enterprise, we will get the labor people in that enterprise to visit with the labor people in the enterprise we are about to privatize – sit together, tell them their own experiences, assuage their fears, like look, this is what happened, we got our pay, and all that. So we try to bring them together. All the bad experiences you have, you also tell them, because we don’t want to hide anything. We want you to also understand if we made mistakes in your case, this is an opportunity for us to correct it in their case. So tell them everything. That open discussion has also helped us in improving on our labor relationships.

Before, when we started, we segmented our communication. First of all when we started, no Nigerian wanted privatization. They believed government should continue to run everything. So then we had to be visiting the state government, visiting the chiefs, the local chiefs, the local government chairmen, and others. But at a point, they’ve come to accept; yes, you can privatize but we don’t think it’s transparent enough. So we moved to another realm of communication to start telling them, look, we are doing everything to make sure it’s transparent. We are using some investors who have won enterprises to say look, this is how we participated and this is how transparent it was. On the days of opening of bids, we call radio and television stations to broadcast them live so the whole country can see how it is done live. So through the past few transactions, they are now believing that it is transparent. So it’s also making our job a little easier. Apart from not wanting it done, our major challenge then was when people impugn that it is not transparent enough. Right now there is still belief that we are selling only to government officials, which is one area that – especially when you’re the chairman of NCP (that is, NCP is the Nation Council on Privatization)– when you’re chairman they believe that you’re buying everything. But it’s from what has happened in the past. That is probably why they are saying that. But we try as much as we can to tell them that look, this case is no longer the case. We would also be honest with them, that look, when you say we are selling to rich people, only rich people can afford what we are selling anyway. I can’t afford them. If you’re selling one company for $300,000,000, where am I going to get it from?
So all we can do is what we do – reserve some percentage to be taken to the capital market where if you want to buy, you go to the capital market and buy shares and be part owner of the company. But in terms of what we call core investor, its only rich people that can afford them. There is no point hiding that we are selling to rich people. Yeah we are selling to rich people. I believe in truth in advertising.

So there are any internal – within your organization – or external rules that guide your practice?

Just --I don’t know if you’ll call it rule of thumb. There are certain things you know. If you know the right thing, do the right thing. I can issue a press release to my colleagues and say look, don’t use this press release until a certain date. And if you violate that, it means I wont send press releases to you again. When you were about recording, you told me that this is what this is for. If we are holding a conversation over the phone, and you are recording without telling me, and you go and publish that, I may not go to the extent of suing you, but I will never hold telephone conversations with you again. There is one particular reporter that was (inaudible word) for doing that. I called his editor and said look… well he called that his reporter is reporting that I don’t pick his calls. I said yes, because each time we hold conversations, our conversation is in the papers the next day. I can hold confidential conversations with you knowing that you are not going to publish. But if you are going to publish, then I cant do that again. If we are on the phone and you ask me, can you report this? Then I can tell you yes or no. And if I told you yes, then you can go ahead and do that. But f I said no, then you shouldn’t do that.

So is there any training process that people that you hire in your department have to go through?

Well I guess because of my own bias I prefer… Because my major, major concentration is media, most of the people I hire are mostly from the media. We’ve had a few PR practitioners who were with agencies. What I find out is that they are more analytical – especially the people we hired from the agencies who are pure PR practitioners. They are more analytical in the way they approach PR. But I find the people coming from the media are very beneficial when it comes to say crisis communication. The pure PR people, are like I said – more analytical – but they are slower in their responses when there is crisis. Those of us that practiced in the media before the new media came on, even before the printing, those days had to go through so many processes to get the newspaper in the news stand. We believed in deadline pressure. So I find them beneficial because I could call my colleagues and say that this is what… and we need to get a story out in the next two hours. No analysis. Let’s just do it. So they have their benefits, but I guess I could say I have fewer people from the agencies, from the pure PR background, than from the media.
So basically there’s no exact training. It’s just kind of like their background, what their experience is…

Exactly. Experiences mostly.

Okay. So there’s no kind of training, but since we are talking about experience, do they have to have a certain kind of certification, or is it just kind of…

No. No certifications. In most cases when they come here, if you are not a member of the NIPR, we encourage you to join. But for me, most cases writing skills. You have to have that. You have to have a background in strategic PR planning. If you were in the media, and I tell you that we need to get a press release out this evening, you should know that by 4/4:30 editorial meetings have closed; and your story – if it is going to be considered for strategic pages – is no longer going to be considered. If it is even going to be used, it is going to be used anywhere in the paper. If you have a media background you should have all this at the back of your mind that look, we are sending stories out and we should be able to get them to the media houses before the editorial board meeting is over. You should be able to know when newspapers go to bed. If you don’t get it to them at a particular time, your story won’t be used. Just like, the labor advisor we got who used to be secretary general of the Nigerian labor union was hired for that because we believed he would understand the language used in labor. We don’t understand those languages. The stakeholder; somebody who was in the office of the president; who interacted with all kinds of stakeholders; who would understand the political language and all that; so those are the issues you consider. Because of the spread, you just know the particular area you need experience in, and you look for them.

So what department in your organization is responsible for making the most difficult decisions? I know we talked about public relations being one of the key parts of that, but is there like a certain department or group of departments?

It’s a management decision. In our organization, the departments are created along transaction lines. So if your department has a live transaction then the focus will be on you. We just concluded a power a transaction. The focus was on power transaction for the past two years or so. Now that we are going to oil and gas, the focus is going to be on oil and gas for hopefully the next one year. So the focal point is usually on the large transaction, not necessarily the department. Most decisions are actually joint decisions by the entire management.

And public relations is part of that management?

Yes, yes.
So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or globally?

Well, from my little interaction with a couple of foreign media, I think the only problem they face, especially those of them in government… I’m glad that why we are not in that mold is that my former boss and I thought alike. My former boss, El Rufai was a free thinker. My belief is that let the truth be told, and let people take their decisions. It's not like I am going to expose government secrets, but in government there are certain things people consider secrets that for me are not secrets. When you don't tell people and you allow rumors to foster, then it's more difficult for you to manage that rumor. But if you tell them early enough it helps build confidence in your organization. Foreign journalists tell me that it is only in this organization that whatever they request, they get, and if they can't get it, you give them a time they can get it, or we tell them why they can't get it. It's not like you should call me and tell me you want this and if it's not feasible I will you. I will tell you look, unfortunately I won't give you this because this is the reason I won't give it to you. If you can get it somewhere else, fine but it's not going to come from us. 9 times out of 10, I will give you whatever you want. Sometimes I also give you caveats like you have to use it responsibly.

So what we're saying is that the...

It is comparable everywhere. Even in the U.S I have public servants swear vote of secrecy when they take the job. We swear. Civil servants in Nigeria swear, but the only difference in this organization is that because what you're handling is not for a particular ministry or is not for a particular department, and is what belongs to every Nigerian, you have to tell them the truth all the time. The truth may hurt but you have to tell them. You also have to guard against breach of trust. There are certain things I won't tell you, but like I said, I will tell you reasons why I won't tell you. It's seen all over the world.

So is this a little propaganda issue?

Well, we try to avoid propaganda. Propaganda, my personal belief, is not sustainable. If you tell the truth, you always remember the truth you told and keep telling it. But if you start propaganda, at a point you forget the origin of it, and you detract. But I never believed in it. When we were doing power transaction and the minister had an essay that specialized in propaganda, I called him and told him when you do it, just say that the minister said. Don't get us involved, because I am not going to be part of it. When the minister was removed and then they had issues and started propaganda, I know where we were. What I only did was say I am not going to comment on that issue. Period. Because I didn't want to worsen the situation as it was. So I don't believe in propaganda.
Okay, so do you think that this is a little problem in other organizations that kind of work with the government?

Well I don’t think most actually engage in propaganda – government agencies. The only thing that people can accuse them of is that they don’t give out information as and when due, but not that they mislead them. I don’t know if that is actually rampant – misleading or propaganda. Secrecy is what is the problem, which I also consider a problem. For me there are certain things, which people consider or deem in this organization a secret that I don’t consider a secret. If there is no stamp of secrecy on it I don’t think its secret.

So what factors such as culture or tradition in the Nigerian environment do you think affect public relations practice positively or negatively?

I don’t know if its culture, cause I wouldn’t want to say that bribery is our culture, but it is becoming our way of life. Every Nigerian – not just the journalists – believe that they can never do anything without remuneration or illegal remuneration. Journalists are part of the broader society, so whatever is happening in the society will also… for instance, people in the media, if you know your salary and the kind of car you drive, you ask yourself, can I afford to maintain that lifestyle if I’m out of that line? If you cant, then you know that what you’re doing is wrong. It’s all the way across the board, from the presidency to the gateman. The gateman everywhere you go believes that when they open the gate for you to come in, you must bribe them; you must give them some money. Journalists believe that whenever they come to cover your assignment, you must pay them for that. So its all over the country. It’s part of our lives now. So unfortunately it’s impacting negatively in the PR profession because now what they say is “Go and do PR for them.” It’s an euphemism for “Go and bribe them.” We have to change that. It is whitewashing where you think that removing PR from the organizational structure is going to get people to believe that you are not a PR practitioner. Internally, they still know you as a PR man. The only thing you need to do is tell your stakeholders – whether media or your other stakeholders – that I will give you what legitimately belongs to you, but I am not going to bribe you to do your own job. The only positive part of it is that at least the mindset is changing. Some organizations are now making public affairs, or public relations, or public communications a whole department, which is now bringing them in line with the rest of the departments that you can now equally aspire to go beyond public affairs or public relations.

Finally in what context do you think public relations is most commonly used in the country? Is it mostly in the political/government context or is mostly in the social context, or economic, or entertainment or...?
Yeah I think it's across the board. I believe that any agency that wants to success without PR, is going to be difficult. Your success is based on how you manage your PR as an agency. If you are in entertainment as a producer or whatever, if you don’t have good PR management, your production will go without anyone knowing the value of the quality. Government agency – if you don’t use PR, you can do whatever you want to do and nobody knows but you. The level of success you will achieve is dependent on the quality of your public relations, and the quality of your public relations is also dependent on the quality of your individuals or agencies you hired to do it for you. So I actually believe that across the board, it is as important as the air we breathe.

Well I think that sums it up. Thank you so much for your time, I greatly appreciate it.

Thank you so much.

PARTICIPANT 2

I understand that you are a fellow of the NIPR. Are you affiliated with any other organizations? Do you work for a specific organization apart from the NIPR?

Yes. I am a manager – Manager Programs – with the Nigerian Television Authority.

Oh. Okay. So how many years of public relations experience have you had?

I’ve been in public relations for the past 25 years. To rise to the rank of a fellow is a journey of not less than 20 years. For instance I began with one of the lowest, an affiliate member, then moved to associate member after a year or two; then stay on associate membership for 5 years before you get upgraded to full member. You stay on full membership for 10 years before you can be considered to start writing the exams that will qualify you for a fellow. That’s the process.

Okay. So you just talked about exams. Are there any qualifications or certifications?

Yeah, certifications. Professional examinations, yes. For every level you are supposed, you are mandated, it is compulsory to write professional examinations.

Alright. So have you received any awards for your public relations practice?

Several. I can just remember a few. I am a manager of broadcasting so its in the field of broadcasting I put public relations to bed. Mine is more with image relations – managing image for the broadcasters, Nigerian broadcasters. So I train people in public speaking, compartment presentations, and things like that. So for two years running, I’ve been the best program
presenter of the year, the best television personality of the year. Right now there is another nomination, and I will be taking that award in maybe two weeks – media personality of the year 2014. So there are several of such awards, but its media related. I also have an award as an ambassador of peace.

Okay, so I think we already answered this. You are a member of the NIPR and you are a fellow which is the highest level of membership. In what areas have you worked apart from broadcasting?

Okay like I said, I’ve been in the media. From the radio – which is broadcasting – I also went to the print. I was a reporter with the print, with the National Concord newspaper. I rose to the rank of a senior reporter before the paper was closed down in 1993. I have actually been in media and media related for about 25/26 years. Apart from that, I lecture. I teach public relations. I teach presentation broadcasting in the Benue State University. I also teach at the television college. We have one television college in this country. I also teach presenters. So I am a trainer of presentations.

Do you have an undergraduate or graduate degree in public relations or in a related field?

Okay, yes. I am currently a PhD student, and its in mass communication and public relations.

So your undergraduate degree, was that also in mass communications?

Theatre and communication. I read theatre arts/theatre and communication, then masters in mass communication, and I’m doing my PhD in mass communication with my major in broadcasting.

Did you receive any formal training in the Nigerian Television Authority to be able to practice your public relations effectively?

Yes. You know it’s intertwined. I used to tell people that public relations and broadcasting, or broadcasting and public relations are just two sides of one coin. If you are a broadcaster, you must learn public relations. If you are a public relations person, you must learn aspects of broadcasting. If you don’t you’ll be deficient. So beginning work with the Nigerian Television authority in 1995, under one year I began training professionally at the television college – basic presentation techniques, advanced presentation techniques, and all of that. If you don’t have that professional qualification, you cannot be a trainer. I just told you that I am a trainer of presentations, so I’ve gone through all the presentation techniques; I’ve done all the training in presentations. That’s why I can train others.

When you hire people in your organization, they also have to undergo all this training?
Yes. To be a broadcaster, to be a professional, you undergo all. I mean it’s the same thing we do in public relations, in the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. We emphasize professionalism and excellence, because if you are not a professional you cannot be said to be excellent in that bit wherever, whether it’s in broadcasting, in lecturing, in carpentry, whatever. Whatever you have to do, you must be professional in it. You must learn, and along the line get trained. That’s the only way you can apply excellence in that field. That’s what we stand for in the NIPR, and that’s what we also do in NTA where I work.

You’re talking about professionalization or professionalism. Would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

Public relations is a profession.

Okay. And why would you say that?

A profession because it is where professionals are bred. It’s not an occupation. It’s a profession – a profession of those who make image; image-makers. And you know what it is to be an image-maker? That means you have image yourself; reputation. So it’s a body of professionals who stand out as perhaps the solution to wherever there is image problem. You understand? If you look at public relations from that angle, then you’ll understand us. This is a professional body where people with image problems run to and they get solutions to whatever. Remember, there are so many aspects of image issues. It could be crisis issues, and the way you attend to crisis is what makes the crisis either wider, or reduces the crisis gap. If you’re not a professional, the tendency is to run through the narrow road, the back door through crisis, and you widen the crisis. In public relations, we have experts whose line is crisis management. There are others whose are government relations, media relations, community relations, and all that. So there are different arms of public relations, and they are all image related.

Okay. So within your organization, what positions do public relations practitioners usually hold? Are they usually management positions or are there lower positions?

Public Relations Executives is what they are called. It’s an executive position. It’s a management position. Look at issues of image. I just said to practice public relations, you must have image. You must have the courage. You must be able to stand before someone and they will not look down on you. It’s not a small boys position. Its an executive position, and so those who man public relations are called public relations executives.

Is public relations in your organization a department or is it just an individual?
No, public relations is under a department – the administrative department. In the Nigerian Television Authority, we have a public relations executive who mans the image of this image house, and stand between the organization and the publics. So we have a public relations executive, but they are under the administrative department.

So is this public relations executive in your organization subject to any higher authority within your organization or outside your organization? Are they subject to the NIPR, or are they subject to higher management within the organization?

The organogram is like this. The public relations executives rise through the rank. They are within the administrative department. Then the administrative department is headed by an assistant director administration, depending on the (inaudible word) of the station. Remember NTA is all over Nigeria. And some stations of the Nigerian television authority are zonal network centers. That is like splitting the headquarters into five zones, or six. We are about 11 right now. We have smaller stations, state stations, arranged under bigger stations. For instance, where I come from is a network center. Makurdi is a network center controlling Benue, Taraba, and Nassarawa. The organogram at that center is different from when it’s a state television, for instance NTA Lafia, which is in Nassarawa. So the manager at the top, that is the general manager or the zonal director as the case may be (if it’s a zonal network, the man at the top is a zonal director) then you have the assistant directors, then you have the managers, then you have the (inaudible word). So that’s the organogram. I told you that the public relations executive is under the administrative department and so the administrative department is manned by an assistant director administration under the zonal director. That’s the way it is. They do not report to another organization but they are professionally bound to the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, without which they cannot practice public relations.

So are there any internal or external rules that the public relations practice is bound by?

I just said so. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations is the regulatory body for all public relations practitioners in Nigeria. Just like the American public relations institute is responsible for all the public relations organizations in America or practitioners in America. They are not liable to any influence from anywhere. They are the regulatory body.

Is there a code of ethics that is binding?

Yes sure – developed by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. Remember it was established by an act of the parliament in 1991, so it’s a full-fledged body recognized by law to regulate public relations practice.
Okay. So it doesn’t matter where you work, or in what organization you work. You are bound by…?

If you err professionally, you are sanctioned. Just like the lawyers are bound by the Nigerian Barr Association, that’s the way NIPR is binding on every practitioner within any organization at all.

What are your organizational requirements for public relations practice or practitioners? If you were to hire somebody are there certain requirements that you would have prior to hiring or do you just do all the training after hiring?

I don’t understand that question.

Like if you’re looking to hire public relations practitioners within your organization, are there certain requirements that you want them to have? Do they have to have a public relations degree, or a mass communications degree, or do they have to have certain qualifications? Do they have to be a member of the NIPR?

I just said it, that you cannot practice public relations in Nigeria without being a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

So does that have to be before or after you hire them?

Before they are hired. It is the certificate that admits you to practice anywhere.

Ok. Alright.

Whether or not you have degrees in communication or liberal arts… if you have it, it’s a plus. If you don’t have it, it’s a minus. But the degree or the qualification you have from the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations is the main thing we look out for. Remember there are arms of public relations charged with different responsibilities. There are those who are charged with the responsibility of making sure that organizations hire only professionals within the institute. I’m a member of that - Educational Advisory Board. I’m a member of that board and we make sure you are hired only if you’re qualified, and you are fired if you’re not.

Okay, yeah. Cause I was just going to ask that what if there were people whom you find out are practicing public relations without being members of the NIPR?

You are fired, or you quickly get registered. If you don’t want to be fired, then you quickly register and get trained.

So what if there’s an event where somebody kind of starts their own public relations company, and they are not exactly part of the NIPR? What are the repercussions?
It’s not possible.

Oh. It’s not possible?

It’s not possible at all. If it happens illegally, you’re found, you’re punished.

So I know you told me the different levels or hierarchy of authority within your organization. On what level is the decision making activity? And is the public relations executive part of that process?

Yes. I told you he’s a manager. I gave you an example of myself. I’m a manager, and as such… I am not the stations public relations executive, but every public relations executive is a manager within that system. It is a management function. It is not mediocrity. Its not left for the middle cadre. Its not left for the junior cadre.

Okay. I see. So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to the practice in western countries or even globally?

Oh it’s the same. It’s the same standard. In fact, the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations is a member of the American Institute of Public Relations. In 2010, the annual general meeting of the NIPR was held here in Abuja. It was in partnership with the American Institute of public relations. They actually came and Susan West came in from America and was one of the resource persons.

I have a question about this. I know that in America, and in many other countries, public relations is not a licensed practice like it is in Nigeria. So what do you feel about that? Do you feel like it should be more licensed around the world?

It should. It should. America is a bigger body, a bigger umbrella, a bigger system. Public relations should be licensed, just like we do in Nigeria.

What is the main reason for the licensing?

For regulation. For regulatory purposes. You don’t even open (inaudible word) without something standard. Standardization is the in-thing in anything you want to do. And because we are talking about professionalism, you cannot give different yard sticks for professionalism. That is why there is need for regulation and you know, issues of standardization.

So what factors such as culture or tradition in the Nigerian environment or even in the government do you think positively or negatively affect public relations practice?

I’ve not identified any.

Really?
Mhmm. Because if you look at the African culture, there is public relations in us; in-born. I’ll give you an example. If you were to be a visitor to say, my great grandmother, you will find that as soon as you came in through this door she offers you a cup of water. That is public relations. It’s a hand of welcome. In fact, I grew up to meet my grand mother calling people – passers-by – hey! Welcome! They’re passing, just going their way. Good day! Good day! Please come in and take some water. That is human relations. It’s an arm of public relations. So it’s in us. There’s nothing in the Nigerian culture that inhibits public relations at all. It rather enhances it.

I spoke with someone yesterday who was a little concerned about the issue of bribery and how bribery is kind of associated with the public relations practice.

The brown envelope.

Yes, the brown envelope; in organizations. So how do you feel about that?

Well, I am a manager of resources, and I said look, it depends on how you think, or how you look at it. I just gave you an example of how my grand mother would be ready to share her meals with strangers, passers-by. But that is in line with the bible if you’re a Christian. How did Abraham attract the angels? He was sitting down in his tent on a hot afternoon, and the angels were passing by. They did not turn into his tent. They were passing by, and did not even look at him. He called them. Gentlemen the sun is so high. You’re welcome. Would you please stop by and take some water from me? And they felt oh okay, nice man. They turned in there, and he gave them water. As he was serving them water, the bible told us, he again sent his wife Sarah to please quickly slaughter a ram and dress it for these people. So only God knows how he kept them for that meal to be ready. That is brown envelope. If you translate that, you slaughter a cow, (inaudible phrase) I think it was bought with money, or there is a monetary value attached to it. Now, if I call you for instance, and say please come and cover an event for me, and you are a reporter with so so, I don’t need you to tell me give me money before I know I should fuel your vehicle for you. I don’t need you to tell me say thank you to me, before I’ll say okay, thank you. I just launched a new product – maybe soap or juice. I just opened a juice company. DO I need you to tell me to give you a sample of that juice as a reporter who just came to cover my event? You just came for the opening of that office and it’s a juice-producing factory. Do I need you to tell me to give you juice to taste? If I give you juice as a reporter, would you consider that bribery?

No. I’m writing about the juice.

Thank you. So if you drove--- if I said give me coverage, and I said okay, well you work within an organization, and you are earning salary, so you’ve just done
your job, that is not courtesy. If I come into your house and you’re taking tea – its breakfast – would you invite me for breakfast?

I would invite you for breakfast.

Fine. That’s where the problem is. Now when organizations employ the services of, or call media houses and say come do a job for me, the organization --- You know, I know where the problem is. It is because everything is monetized in Nigeria. Broadcasting, you know, that is monetized – Commercialization of the broadcasting industry. My organization will say pay a fee and then you pay that fee, and then the whole fee is taken to the organization. But then this person who did the work will wait for his pay at the end of thirty days, isn’t it?

Yes.

Courtesy demands that when he comes for your event, with the challenges we have in Nigeria – challenges of no transport within the organization, the reporter is told to go to Nugbe and cover an event, no vehicle, so he jumps into his own car and uses his own fuel and he comes for your event, he takes all the money that is paid for that event and goes back and drops it to the organization, should you not fuel his car? Would you ask him to wait for thirty days to fuel the car to come for your event? These are the things. Now if we don’t take it from the angle of appreciating this person who came to do his job, then you will think you’ve given a bribe. But on the other hand, I told you I’ve been in the field of reportorial duties and broadcasting for 25 years, and at no time, even when I was a field reporter, would I go for an event and ask someone to give me something. No. In fact there is a way you would want to give me something and I will tell you I don’t need it. If I don’t see that it’s out of appreciation, I will tell you not thank you. But some of my colleagues over do. They come for your event and they will tax you. You must do this, you must do that – it’s out of it. If we know that as Africans we are liberal people, as Africans we appreciate people, then issues of what you give as public relations, or PR, or brown envelope will not be termed bribery, and it is not the same. Bribery is when as you call me, you want me to respond to you, and I say pay me 50,000naira before I do your interview. And you know you need this interview, so you pay me grudgingly, complaining you don’t like it, but you have to pay it. That is bribery – I need to do you a favor and I task you to do something for me before I do it; that, is bribery. That’s the corruption. But when I’ve done the job for you, I’m not asking for anything, don’t offer any. But when I have asked for, and then you say oh I appreciate you. I know you transported yourself. Take this. If it’s convenient, I take. Severally, I will say no. That, is out of appreciation and it is accommodated in public relations. It’s in the bible.
Alright. So do you think that the government affects the practice of public relations in any way at all?

No. Rather, public relations affects government, or impacts government. If you were at the meeting yesterday… where you there?

No ma, I wasn’t.

Oh, you missed. We had the director general of the national orientation agency with us, we had people from the senate, the senate president himself represented by his personal assistant, we had professors, we had people from the presidency. Okay? Now they’ve come to brainstorm; to learn from public relations practice – from our AGM. They do not influence us. We rather impact them. And as a matter of fact, happily, they are all members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. The government of Nigeria now recognizes that if you have to manage your image properly, you must employ the professionals. So most of our people are in those offices. They are the ones manning those offices.

Ok, so in what areas is public relations mostly practices or used in the country? Is it mostly government? Or do you think it is across the board – government, socially, politically, or everywhere?

Everywhere. Even politicians know that they now need public relations to manage their image. So when you come into the era of politics, for those who know how to play their politics, they employ public relations managers. Why? Because you may have the best campaign materials, how you sell it is the issue. You may have the best (inaudible word), how you sell it is the issue.

Finally, where do you see public relations going? Is it steadily growing, or do you think that…

Steady growth. Steady growth that is leading to a point where everyone, no matter what your field, would need to belong to the Nigerian institute of Public Relations to be able to function. Even if you are a market woman selling, if you know a bit of public relations, you will attract more buyers.

That’s absolutely true.

Yeah, so it’s growing, and we thank God for that. Nigeria needs public relations to succeed.

Alright! Well I think that rounds up the interview. Thank you so much. I greatly appreciate your time, and if you would like a copy of the final thesis I can give that to you as well, once its completed.

I would love that!
PARTICIPANT 3:
How many years of public relations experience have you had, Sir?
34
34?
Yes.
Okay.
All of my working career.
Oh. So all of your working career has been in public relations?
Yes. Coincidentally, right now, I am the general manager of operations here, and my job is managing the supply and distribution of petroleum products in Nigeria.
Okay. So do you currently do any public relations work?
I am in charge of corporate services. I am heading two departments. I am a manager that does the day-to-day running of the company. I actually joined this place in 2003 as a permanent staff, and my job was public relations. We call it corporate services, and in December 2011, I was now asked to head the operations department and to combine it with corporate services.
So you currently do both?
Yes, I currently do both. Before then I was the deputy director, corporate services with the National Board for Community Banks. You know community banks in Nigeria are called independent banks in America?
Oh, okay. Okay.
Those small one unit, one-branch banks. Before that, I was actually a chief liaison officer for (inaudible word) in Lagos, covering public relations. At that time it was information officer that was nomenclature. They are so many nomenclatures.
Ok. So Sir, do you have qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?
Sure. I have my first degree in English, my masters was in communication arts. My BA was English from Uni. Lag. And then I have my masters in communication arts from the university of Ibadan, and I have a PhD in media arts from the university of Abuja.
And are you a member of the NIPR Sir?
Yes, I’m a fellow. About 20 years ago I was the chairman in Abuja. About three times I was in council, and up till 2011 – from 2006 till 2011 – I was the secretary general of the African Public Relations Association.

So that’s the one for the whole of Africa?

Yes.

Okay. For how many years have you been a member of the NIPR and the African Public Relations Association?

I think from 1982 till date. That should be some 30 years.

And you said you’ve worked in public relations your whole career?

Yes. But you see, from day 1 in my career, I recognized the fact that there are not enough challenges for me just doing information jobs, public relations jobs. So I elected at all my work places to be part of the main mandate, main responsibility, main function in the organization. So I started with National Youth Service Corp as an information officer in 1979/80 and from there I was actually an inspector. I was employed as an information officer but I went to meet my boss that I have sufficient capacity to work in the operations office. So I was combining my work as an information officer with inspectors job. Have you done youth corp?

No Sir, I haven’t.

Okay. If you’ve done youth corp, it’s a one-year service Nigerians have to do, and in that capacity, I was even in charge of the biggest local government then. But still I felt like there wasn’t much; I felt like there was much more I could do. So I initiated a research study in NYSC then, that rather than give the annual evaluation that they do to University of Lagos consultancy unit, and university of Ibadan consultancy unit, that actually we as national institute of youth corp officers can do it. The idea was bought, and I became the national coordinator for the pilot study of evaluating national youth service corp in Anambra, Ondo, and Sokoto State. So at the end of it we published a pilot study. I did that in anticipation that youth corp was going to be 10 years. So two years later we did another evaluation.

Oh, Okay, okay.

Till today, evaluation of national youth service corp is done in-house. From then on, all I did was just to add the research skill to my communications skill, and that is why it was possible for me – everywhere I worked – to be the hub or the rallying point of the organization. A lot of our professional colleagues don’t recognize this. They just hold on to the information. What will you inform if you don’t know what the job is about? When I was in community banks for three years, I was rendering a monthly report to central bank. For three
years, I was covering all the board meetings. Here, even though I was in corporate services, I have always been involved in all that we are doing. From 2008-2009 I was actually the chief executive here, so when I had another CEO, I stepped back into my position. In 2011 when I was now asked to be in charge of operations, it was not difficult. Every vessel that brings in petroleum products into Nigeria has to be (inaudible word) that they can go ahead (inaudible phrase). Anyway, the point I want to make is that for a public relations person to be successful, he has to be part and parcel of the main function of that organization. Many of us don’t do that, and so we complain that we are not involved, somebody else is doing our job, and stuff like that. That will happen. But here, the most important department here is operations, and it is not about writing features or stories or anything that you will talk about in relation to public relations per say, and yet I have been able to combine all of that, and because you are a communicator you probably do the job better. The bottom line is that whatever you are doing should be understood by the man on the street. He will know that there’s a pilot, there are crewmembers, what the usual protocols are in airplanes and all the rest of it. In any case, even the pilot flying the plane wouldn’t know how the electrical wires were concocted together, cannot say how the builders of the engine did it, you know. But when he gets into that cockpit, with all the buttons that are there, he can manage it. But the man who built the engine can’t manage those buttons. So the job of the communicator is the person who brings all of these things together, and makes sense out of it; and makes it understandable to people – to the extent that you can relate to it without being an electronic expert or name it, you know. So I think that is one of the missing links that we have. And I guess that Amanpour, when she is discussing with anybody, be it any world leader or (inaudible phrase) people like that, there is a demonstrable appreciation of those subjects, no matter how diverse they are. Any public relations person that is completely lost when you are talking about climate change, when you are talking about governmental issues, even space expeditions and what have you, then in the same way, he is going to find it difficult to even understand basics, and I believe that is the problem. There is no interest. For them there is a dichotomy between the job of communication they are doing in public relations, and the tasks that the organization is performing, and there is none. You just need to understand it to the extent that you as the communications expert in that organization can always tell them that look, the way we are going, we are going to have problems; because you know what is happening in other places in the environment – politically, socially, economically – and therefore you know what you are doing too and you can see that there is going to be some danger. Its likely that they may not listen to you, but you will get there if you are correct. The first time, the second time, and the third time, then the begin to listen to you.
So Sir, did you receive any formal training by any of the organizations you worked for, or by the NIPR to be able to practice public relations effectively?

Of course, but I elected on my own to train myself. I have never really demanded for my organization to train me.

Okay. And none has ever really trained you formally for the job?

The opportunities are there. I just elect to do it myself because I know that it is for me. That is why I am able to do everything I do. I have been to Lagos Business School, I have attended a lot of programs by the international communications association in London, and I’m a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the UK. Virtually almost all the conferences and trainings by NIPR I have attended. I have organized conferences around Africa for 5 or 6 years consecutively from South Africa to Uganda, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria here, and next year we are going to (inaudible word) for our conference in May. So I’ve attended a lot of trainings in public relations, and because of my research interests and because I understand that public relations must have content, I have also attended a lot of related trainings. I was in Harvard for a seminar on negotiation skills. I was in Houston for strategic thinking. I was in California recently for a 5 days seminar and workshop – stuff like that. Now the Houston, Harvard, and San Francisco – all of those ones were by my organization. But the one I was talking about is, when I go for IPRA (International Public Relations Association), when I go for APRA, when I go for NIPR, I just make sure that I go to that myself, wherever it is. But in my organization, I am in charge of corporate services and definitely, when I am making my choice of trainings that I would like to go for I picked up these choices. So it is both.

Okay. So in your organization is the public relations department called public relations?

Here it is corporate services.

Corporate Services?

In the community bank it was public relations, and we later changed it to public affairs. Here from the beginning it was corporate services. When I was in MAMSA, it was the information unit; the same thing with NYSC.

Okay. So is it an independent department, or is it part of a larger department?

In National (inaudible word) it was a unit. In MAMSA it was a unit under the chairman’s office. In community banks it was a unit under the chairman’s office. But in PPPRA it is a department.

Okay. And is this department subject to a higher authority, or is it a managerial department?
How? What do you mean?

Like are they part of the management of the organization, or are they subject to higher management in the organization?

Of course. Even the Chief Executive of the organization is subject to higher levels of supervision. My boss will report naturally to the honorable minister, who reports to the President. So whether it’s an information or public relations unit, division or department, it is directly responsible to the CEO.

Okay. Are they bound by any rules and regulations from the NIPR?

Of course. Well yes, because NIPR says that unless you are a professional you should not be practicing public relations. But all over the place, people who don’t even know where or what NIPR is are practicing. I guess that’s the weakness of the institute.

So it is not very effective?

They are not very effective. This morning we have a new president; just this morning. And he will make a lot of changes. Any institute, any professional institute, the only thing they have to achieve whatever they want to achieve is professionalism, education. Any other thing is not (inaudible word). So once they cannot turn themselves into a viable educational institution, they are not there, because it is training, training, and training. If you are looking for money you generate it from there. Don’t keep on begging governors, begging ministers, or government to give you money, when all you have is your professionalism to impact knowledge. Everybody needs a measure of education and communication, and it is done (inaudible phrase). My own postulation is that our development is stranded because there is no communication. You can see all those letters that people are writing the last couple of days, it is simply because people are just not communicating.

An example, the government wants to build an express road (inaudible word). They want to dualize the road from here to Lokoja. They wanted to do it between 2006 and 2009. That’s about 3 years or 4 years, and they decided that the entire 180 stretch of road – or is it less – should be done at a go. So they’ve been at it since 2006 till now; something they were supposed to do in 4 years. 2006 till now is almost 8 years. When you travel on the road you can see some completed, some not completed, some nothing has been done; simply because somebody is not thinking. The way things are done is you first of all ask yourself, how much do I have? And then how much can this money do for what I want to do? So what would have made sense is that you just could’ve started from Abuja here to Agbaji, which is just about 80 km. when you finish it, then you start another stretch. But because of (inaudible word) because you want some
money or whatever it is, you open the entire place, and for 8 years you are just battling there. You are now saying it is not well funded. If it was not well funded then you didn’t need to take the entire stretch. Okay? The point I’m trying to make is that if we communicate and the various stakeholders are brought into the discourse, the likelihood is that they could have done better than what they did. Some of the so called ministers of works just feel that they have to do a road, and they take the proposal to the federal executive council meeting, it is approved, money is allocated or not allocated, and that’s it. The thing is there forever. It doesn’t work. For example, in Abuja there were two lanes to the airport. It could not be good enough to just be fair, but the truth of the matter is that how many are going to the airport? So when you want to (inaudible word), just expand the road. Even if you like add an additional lane on either side. That will just be it. You know what they did? They opened up 8 lanes to the airport. All they needed to do at that time, if they were consulting, if people who are (inaudible word) don’t assume that they know everything, and they are talking to the people, all they needed to do was to build another by pass through Ije to Gwagwalada. That’s it. All the people on the airport road, are they going to the airport? They are going to the north. They have done the one for Kaduna now. The entire traffic we are talking about is no longer there. That would have been the reasonable thing to do at that time. But when people are put in positions they assume that they know it all, so we are not communicating.

So I know you said that is a lack of communication, but do you think that is also a lack of public relations and the acceptance of…?

What do public relations people do? What’s your tool? Communication.

So do you think that’s just in the government and political side of it, or you think that’s in most organizations? - that there is just a lack of appreciation of public relations?

In most organizations. We talked about the fact that they even make the public relations man anything, but they don’t talk to him. They don’t even need him. I for example, I’m just myself because I have a passion for the profession. Otherwise, I can survive without it. But you see, the interesting thing for me is that not everybody has that passion for it. When I finished school many years ago, I thought I could be an agriculturist, I thought I could be a banker, I thought I could be a communications person – which I finally chose. After banking, agriculture, youth development and working with political education, I now find myself in oil and gas, which everybody thinks is operated in secrecy. My own submission is that yes, there might be some areas that are not clear to people, but it is because people have not really taken the trouble to understand what it is all about. How many people go to the Internet to check what an organization is doing on their website? We don’t do that. They read what the paper has written. The
paper is another opinion of what has been given. But the bottom line is that for you as a communications person, you must be able to access the source. What do you find people doing? People are busy with bb, pinging, facebook – I don’t all of those ones, unfortunately. I don’t think I’m missing anything.

Ok. So do you consider public relations in Nigeria to be more of an occupation or a profession and why would you say that?

Both, depending on your definition. I don’t know the definition of an occupation. I think that’s what you just live by. So I don’t know, I’m asking you.

Well yes, an occupation would be something that you just do for -- maybe something like carpentry, but a profession has more of a professional body, a body of knowledge, a code of ethics, professional standards etc.

I would say that it’s both. Some people are doing it like I found myself here and I have to do it. Some people are doing it professionally in the sense that they go, they enroll (inaudible word) to understand it and to practice it professionally, be certified and what have you. So you have both, and nobody can really say this is how it has to be. The proportion of those who are practicing it professionally and those who are doing it as an occupation… to the extent that Nigeria has the largest number of practitioners in Africa and to the extent that even government is one of the highest employers of public relations practitioners. If you look at the service, if you look at the military, the police – very many of them, the customs – so many, I don’t know about the prisons but they will be there – they are. In fact they have a television program. So government is the highest employers of public relations practitioners. Most corporate bodies that hire public relations are the big ones, the multinationals, trans-nationals, and big companies, and they don’t run elaborate public relations departments. They probably will have like 2 or 3 public relations practitioners, then they have about 10 people in marketing. I don’t really think they have departments for advertising, but they do a lot of advertising. So it depends on the organizations. So you can now see maybe about 70% are doing it as a profession. Whether they are doing it right or not is a different ball game. And you can give the remaining 30% to those who are doing it as an occupation.

Okay so how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations globally? Especially with regards to professionalism. Well, it is true that you have the like of Shell, Chevron, oil companies; you have the likes of MTN, Airtel, global companies, you have the likes of all those five star hospitalities, you have the likes of multinationals like lever brothers, you have banks that are no longer just Nigerian banks. Now to that extent, all of those corporate bodies one can say confidently, that public relations
practitioners in Nigeria are practicing at the level of best practices across the world. Of course like we are trying to talk about percentages of those who are doing occupational practices against professional ones, to a very large extent I think Nigerian public relations practitioners are up to it. You know, those other groups that may be doing it as just a job that gives you your daily bread, and may not have the professional training like you said, sometimes those who don't have formal training may even be very successful. It depends on what the definition of that organization is. What they want, or what are their expectations. Most practitioners can be regarded as professionals. Now you know there is a myth about public relations – that the public relations man is the spokesperson of the organization, and therefore he has to be reporting to the chief executive. It’s a myth. In 1991 I was the assistant director for public relations in community banks. I was already an assistant director, so else would I have reported to other than the chief executive? That is as far back as 1991. 1991 to date is about 23 years. Now suppose a new (inaudible word) comes to an organization, and he or she is designated as so so officer, if he thinks that he can relate to the CEO, he is wasting his time. He will commit blunders and they will be irrelevant. Because first of all, there is nothing – no experience. He might know the theories. In fact the theories are not in sync with the actuals in the field. So the point I want to make is that yes, the spokesperson is the chief image-maker of the organization, but I have never adopted that. I don't even talk to the press. I don’t, because I believe that an organization must have one face to the public, and that should be the chief executive. Now if you have a chief executive that cannot speak, that is confused, and all the rest of it, somebody can be nominated to do it. But I have avoided it all my work. I have never really gone to television or radio to go and say something. I always insist that my boss does it.

Okay, so what you're saying is that the public relations department is part of the decision making process of the organization?

Yeah, absolutely. Don’t you know that when I was just an ordinary officer, was made the secretary to management meetings. So I became an authority. So everywhere I’ve worked, I’ve have been. But there are not many professionals that they will give that opportunity to. If you don’t develop yourself to the extent that you have a very very good knowledge of what your organization is doing… most people don’t get it. After 5 years, 7 years, 10 years sometimes, they don’t even have an idea what the organization is doing. They can be surprised. Like I’m seated here now, we have maybe about 50 + depots where fuels are discharged everyday, and I don't know where they are physically. But when I see the paper, I see the number that is going in there and it sticks. So if we are talking about it tomorrow and there are supposed to be 10000 metric tons and you are saying there are 8 or even 9.5, then I say no. Go and bring the paper. And when they bring it they see it. So what I'm saying is that there
is nothing that is more technical than that. Most other jobs are written. Even this one I’m telling you now is written. In oil and gas when you are talking about the numbers, it is average. There is nobody that can tell you this is the price today. The price they nominate today is averages of several every minute, every hour. So I’m just agreeing with you – that the public relations person should be part of the management. But they will only invite you if you can add value to what they are doing; if you can bail them out if they have problem.

Well finally Sir, last question. I know we talked a little bit about the lack of communication in the system and everything, but what other factors do you think, either culturally, or traditionally or within the Nigerian environment – even politically or socially, affect public relations practice?

The first one is the fact that there are many practitioners that do not have any passion for the profession. Their being in the profession is accidental. They probably read history, English, sociology and suddenly there is nothing to do. And then because she has the privilege to have been abroad or gone on one vacation, and speaks with an accent, then we think, oh this is the right person, and the person themselves does not know that you need to fill in what you don’t have, so he or she comes into the job and continues to do it the way it has been done. That doesn’t help. See, training is key. Secondly, no organization provides funds sufficiently. In many cases, for the public relations job, it is only where there is crisis that they are prepared to spend any money. So money is a problem. And then the last one is the fact that there are so many “professionals” who are professionals in name only. They don’t belong to any chapter. Once they collect their associate membership or full membership, they are gone. Including fellows. So they don’t interact with the institute at all, and they are practicing.

So there is basically no progress.

Yes. And what that tells you is that you cannot guarantee what kind of knowledge they impact. So that is a big problem. Nobody can be a professional without the institute. A lot of people don’t recognize that. So going forward I think that these are some of the areas that have to be looked into. Every public relations person must have content – must know the organization inside out. If I am not there for one week, and they tell me that a meeting is holding, I can tell you what anyone said – not verbatim – but I can tell their behavior and what they said. So I think that the profession has a good opportunity to endure but it has to be through (inaudible word) effort.

Ok, well thank you so much for your time Sir.
PARTICIPANT 4

How many years of public relations experience have you had Sir?

26 years

Okay, and do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Yes, I have a diploma in mass communication; I have a PGD in marketing; I have a masters of science in public relations, then I have the (inaudible word) diploma of London Chamber of Commerce and Industry in public relations and advertising.

Okay, so you're a member of the NIPR?

Yes, I am a member of the NIPR.

You're a fellow, Sir?

Yes.

And for how many years?

I joined the institute in 1989. So 89 – 2009 should be 20 years, and up to this time, that is about 24 years.

Okay. So can you please tell me Sir, in what different areas you have worked?

I started out in 1987 September, as a public relations lecturer at the plateau school of accountancy and management studies. I started as a lecturer in the mass communication department teaching public relations and advertising courses. After about 5 years, I became the public relations officer of the school, but I kept teaching as well. Then after another 5 or 6 years, I became the director of student affairs and public relations of the school. In 2003, I left the school. So I worked with the school for about 15 years. After that I started a training outfit of my own. I’ve been running my own outfit from 2003 till now. So what we do? We are into public relations training – management and leadership training, - customer service, and we receive a lot of invitations to speak at workshops, apart from the workshops I organize. At the level of the institute, between 2005 and 2009 I was the national training coordinator for the institute. Now, I coordinate the training for the institute in the north-central part of the country.

Okay, okay. And this is the NIPR we are talking about?

Yes.
Okay. So are any of your degrees Sir, in public relations?

My masters.

Oh okay.

My masters is in public relations.

Oh you said this before. Yes.

A master of science in public relations from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Okay, okay.

And a higher diploma in public relations, advertising and marketing from London Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Okay. So Sir, are you currently working for or affiliated with any organization?

I run my own outfit.

Your own personal one?

Yes.

Okay. And does your organization provide any kind of formal training for employees?

We do. We do. Like the British council, they run some training programs, so we send our staff there. I also attend. Sometimes when we run an NIPR program I encourage my staff to also take part in the program. We believe so much in training because we are trainers. So we keep training our people as well.

I see. So Sir, would you please tell me how you would define public relations?

Yeah public relations is a two way communication system designed to build and sustain mutual understanding between an organization and its various publics. That is the simple definition of public relations.

So Sir, would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession? And why?

Public relations is a profession, because for any vocation to be accepted as a profession, there must be a gate through which people must pass before they can practice. The NIPR is like the gate. The NIPR has a law that makes it the regulatory agency of government in the area of public relations practice. So NIPR determines the qualifications and the kind of people that will come in. It is not anybody in Nigeria that can just be a PR person. If they are, they are practicing it illegally. The law states that to be
a PR person in Nigeria, you must be a member of the NIPR. So there is a law that guides people who come in. Secondly, as a profession, you also must have a code of ethics that tell people what to do and what not to do. We have our professional codes of ethics, so that makes us a profession. Then as a profession as well, you must continue to (inaudible phrase). You look at what happens in every part of the world. If people are not kept informed about what an organization is doing, about what a government is doing, there will be chaos. So based on these factors, I can say that public relations is a profession in the country.

So Sir, you were talking about the fact that if you are not member of the NIPR and you practice public relations its not legal.

Yeah.

What are the repercussions for that?

The institute can prosecute you, the employee, and even the employer, because there is a law.

So how effective is the NIPR in making sure that people are practicing professionally?

Ok now, so two areas. We ensure that people practice professionally by organizing what we call the continuing development program. We have to bring people year in, year out. SO we have to ensure that we are professionally minded. Secondly, there are a lot of books coming out from the institute by our members. I just came out with a book. The title is Ultimate Public Relations (inaudible word). All of my colleagues are writing. Like Dr. *** is also a writer, the registrar is also a writer, many of us. It is also one of the ways to encourage people to be professionally minded. Besides that, we also have what we call mentoring programs, where some young professionals, budding professionals, will link up with those who are already in the field for some years and they work with us, and they get to know more about the profession. But one area we have not done well in as the institute, is the area of ensuring that we stop people from practicing illegally.

Okay.

You see somebody who read English say he is a PR person. Somebody who read Yoruba or Igbo says he is a PR professional, but it is not supposed to be. The institute has also not done enough to prosecute people. We have done little in prosecuting people, so indirectly we are encouraging people to practice without being registered.

So what does membership in the NIPR require? Does it require a public relations degree at any level? What are the requirements?
The act of parliament that set up the NIPR has different qualifications – about five of them. The first one is the NIPR professional certificate and diploma. Then there is Business Education Examination Council public relations examination, then there is the communication advertising and marketing foundation exam in London – CAM – which we also write, then there is the Chartered Institute of Public Relations membership diploma, then there is the first degree or HND in mass communication or a masters in mass communication or in public relations. Any of these five; if you have any of these five you can become a member of the NIPR.

It sounds like some of these are also international certifications as well.

Sure, sure.

Okay. So what kind of duties do public relations professionals perform in their organizations in the Nigerian environment?

Generally, as public relations professionals, this is what we do. We are involved in a lot of writing. If you are not a good writer, you won’t make a good PR person. We are involved in speaking. We are involved with production that has to do with printing – calendars, diaries, and all of that stuff. We are involved with research. You have to research to find out what people are saying about your organization so you know how to adjust. We are involved with protocol assignment. We have people who are involved in arranging transport documents, travel documents, visa, passports, and the rest of them. We are involved in events management. When an organization is going to have an event, you have to arrange with the hotel, arrange for catering and all of those. We are also involved in counseling management – advising management that based on this research, this and this may happen, lets do this and this. We are also involved in customer service and customer relations – relating well with the customers of an organization so that they get to understand the organization very well. We are also involved in government relations. We are involved in community relations. We are involved in corporate social responsibility, and I can go on and on.

Yeah. Just different branches of public relations.

Yes.

Okay so you said counseling management was one of the things that you were involved in. So what kind of positions do public relations practitioners hold? Are they mostly management positions and are they involved in the overall decision making of the organization?

Now it all depends on that public relations person and his level of qualification. When you are just coming in, nobody will give a new graduate membership of any management. It depends on the number on years you have put in. But
the best position that PR person can occupy is to be the head of public relations. The person who heads the public relations department is to be a member of management where the decisions are taken. If PR is not injected into decision making the decisions are not likely to be popular, they are not likely to be accepted by the people. But if the PR people are involved in this, they can tell you, they can give you (inaudible word) about what people are thinking, and that will help management to (inaudible word). But now I must say one thing to be frank with you. There are many organizations where PR has not been allowed to operate at the management level. But I tell you it is to their own disadvantage. It is to their own disadvantage. But there are also quite a lot of organizations where PR people are members of management, taking decisions.

So is it growing? Is there a progress where organizations are now more accepting of public relations?

Oh sure, sure. It is growing. When I started out like I told you, my school never had a PR person. We just had PR lecturers and the rest of them. They started with me – appointed me as the PR person. After a while they moved me to be a director in PR, and they appointed some other persons under me who were like PR officers, student affairs officers. The thing is growing. In every part of the country the thing is actually growing. Even in government it is growing. The places where you have gone before and (inaudible word) is just a PRO, now some of them are now the directors of PR, deputy director of PR.

So its mostly management positions?

Yes. It is. If it will work, it should be management positions.

Okay, so it is usually an individual or is it a department within an organization?

Now, the two will go depending on the size of your organization. When you take an outfit like MTN into consideration, they have over 50 persons who are in the PR department. If you take an outfit like PHCN before their unbundling, they had over 100 people who are in the PR department. NYSC today has over 150 people who are public relations people. So the size of the organization determines the number of people that will be employed. In many big organizations, it is a department. In some small outfits that are just growing it might just be one man to do it.

So we are talking about management and how they are typically management positions. Are they independent departments or are they subject to higher authorities within the organization?

The best positioning would be that every department should be on its’ own. PR department should be independent of advertising, dependent of marketing, dependent of production; that is the best arrangement. But
there are some few organizations where they have not really appreciated PR enough where you have a marketing department, and under marketing you have the sales unit and the PR unit. When you do it that way, you are telling PR to service only marketing. But when you have PR department, marketing department and production, you are telling PR to service the whole organization.

So in what ways does public relations in Nigeria, or in your organization serve the clients?

We have to look at the PR consultancies now. They are professionals who have done a lot of years in some private or government organizations and have now set up so that organizations outsource part of their PR challenges to them. Take for instance an outfit that wants to produce a documentary film. They may just call a PR outfit and say submit proposals, and about 2 or 3 will submit, and they pick one of them. In producing a documentary film, in handling very specialized areas like government relations, your outfit may be, let me say in Maiduguri which is about 9 or 10 hours drive, and you need to be contacting and knowing what is happening in the national assembly, you may get a PR outfit that is based here to do that for you. If you want to monitor the media – you can see that the media now has so many newspapers, so many magazines, the social media are also there – you may also have a PR outfit that does that for you. So it means that there are some assignments that will be done by the in-house PR man, and there will be those that will be outsourced to PR agencies.

Are there any rules and regulations that bind the practice of public relations? I know we mentioned the code of ethics of the NIPR.

Yes. The code of ethics is the major one, but besides that, different organizations have different what we call PR policies guiding their people on what to do. They are just policies or guidelines.

So how effective do you think the code of ethics of the NIPR is?

Two ways. One, for you as an individual who wants to maintain a good name, you have to respect the code so that you are not dragged before the committee when they are looking at those who have breached the rules. But sometimes you also see some people who have breached it and nothing seriously has happened to them, so we have this issue. And sometimes, when nobody reports somebody to the institute, the institute may not know that somebody has erred.

Okay. So I think we’ve mentioned lack of being able to monitor those who are not practicing professionally and also no repercussions for people who break the code of ethics. So what other inadequacies do you think the NIPR has?
I will say for now these are the few that I think we have. Besides this I think the institute is doing wonderfully well.

Okay. Alright. So what are your organization requirements for public relations practice or practitioners?

The academic requirement should just be what the law says, and I read it out already – A first degree in mass communication, or HND or a masters, or the institute professional certificate and diploma or a or the CIPR membership diploma, or the CAM certificate.

So your organizational requirements are just in line with those of the NIPR?

Yes, yes.

Is that how it is for most organizations? Or do different organizations just have different standards of requirement?

Yes, different organizations have been applying different things. They employ some other people – English graduates, religious studies and whatever, - which is wrong. It means that you are not employing a professional, and communication is a very professional thing. Although everybody communicates, everybody is not a professional. So if you employ somebody who is not adequately qualified to manage your communication, the challenge is that if anything goes wrong, the guy will not be able to take care of your image. It might lead to image problems and reputation problems. So that is why it is advisable to employ the qualified persons. We are not saying those who have read anything outside of mass communication or PR should not come into PR. They should come in, but when they come in, they should be subjected to writing the professional exams. That is it.

Okay. Speaking of appropriate qualifications, is there any training process that your staff go through in your organization?

Yes. When you come in newly, we do orientation and induction. Besides that, twice in a year you attend some training programs.

So shifting gears a little bit, how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or even globally?

I will say we are doing well here based on the facilities and infrastructure that we have. But because they have better facilities, better structure, they may have upped their practice much more than ours. Like today, there is some material that I was expecting from Lagos yesterday, they couldn’t send it. The guy said later today. At a point they said they were going to give it to a bus driver to bring it to Abuja. I said this is something that you can just scan and we will get it here. So it means that if the facilities are not
available, or if the practitioners are not adequately trained and they don’t know how to use the facilities, it may affect public relations practice. This morning I was supposed to be in Calabar to coordinate a training program. Because of the AGM, I couldn’t go, but I sent one of my staff to coordinate it, and this morning I’ve sent him 4 papers. I woke up this morning, sent the papers which would be delivered there. I didn’t have to be there so I sent the stuff. So if we are competent, if we are well trained, there are so many things that we can do that will affect public relations positively, and affect the society positively.

So are there any factors culturally, traditionally, or otherwise, politically, socially, or even economically in the Nigerian environment that you think affect public relations practice?

Sure. In fact all of them do – socially, politically, economically. All of these affect PR. For instance now, government public relations is mostly propaganda in our country. Government will not open his hands and just employ you as the DG of one of its media organizations, and you say it the way you should. No. You see government PR people trying to package government even when wrong has been done. They still want to tell you no, this is the right thing we are doing. That is bad for PR practice. Now economically, if the money is not there, if we don’t have enough funds, there are things that we should do that we will not be able to do. I tell you, the great area where people in PR are doing well in our country is the private sector. They are really using PR well, and they are getting the reward for it. That’s how some outfits will come and tell you our profit last year was 10 billion naira, 20 billion naira; because they are doing their work well. They are communicating with the people. Customer service is there, government relations, community relations, and the rest of them. But government is not doing very well in PR. Government employs the wrong person, government does not fund the department properly, government PR departments do not usually have good facilities. But we have some exceptions to this rule. There are some that are actually good even though they are government PR practitioners.

So are there any other factors that you can think of that are affecting the growth and development of public relations?

Yeah. Poor training. If people do not submit themselves to training, if you employ people and don’t train them, they wont do well for you. Another one is the issue of nepotism where people employ people based on friendship, based on family ties and what have you. When you look at all of this, it will affect the practice. You may be very good. Maybe you are the head, and they now give you about two/three guys who do not know what they are doing, it may affect your morale, and it will slow down the job.
That’s true. I spoke to someone a couple of days ago who thought bribery was a little issue – the whole brown envelope issue. How do you feel about that? Do you think that something that is attached to the public relations practice in Nigeria?

Let me say this. It has to do with the level of economic power of the people. When people are not empowered economically, they will take anything. They are ready when they come to cover your event. Instead of them to go, they will start lurking around asking for transport fair. Let's assume that from my office to their place they just take a taxi of N200, and you give them 200 naira, they won't collect it from you. It's not only transport fair he's asking for. He's asking for much more. It is actually a major setback in PR. This means that if you give them, they are ready to do your bidding even against public interest. They can cover dirty things for you, they can do all of that, and it is wrong. So because of that, when some government outfit or private outfit would have done something wrong, they are ready to give them so that they will not report what they should. It is bad for PR. If we have a very transparent practice, it means organizations would sit up. If you don’t do well in your organization and you employ PR, you are going to have problems, because the PR will expose your inefficiency. But I believe that as we grow in the practice we will get better. Some of these challenges have also been there in the developed countries before they overcame them and are now doing well.

That’s true. That’s true. So in what context do you think public relations is most commonly used in the country, or most commonly appreciated? Would you say it is government, politics, social, or...

It is mostly appreciated in the private sector in the commercial outfits more than the government outfits. Most government organizations feel that we are not selling anything, and whatever happens, we are already in government, nothing happens to me. But in the private sector you know that if you do not do it well, the customer might not come back, and he will not recommend your product to another person. So they are doing better in the private sector.

Alright, well I think that concludes our interview.

Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Sir. I greatly appreciate it.

You’re welcome.
PARTICIPANT 5

Will you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you have had?

Well, professionally now I will say 7 years. But in the real sense, I have been doing PR for people outside the office.

Okay. Like freelance?

Yeah. So if I want to combine that I will be talking more than 20 years. But in terms of full occupation now that I am doing, I will say 7 years. I read mass communication, so I have a first degree in mass communication, with a specialization in print journalism. Then my second degree is still in mass communication, with a specialization in PR and advertising. This is my academic background.

So, do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice apart from your second degree?

Oh, why not? There is a law by that is set up by what we call the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. So before you practice, you must subscribe to it. That’s the (inaudible word) that makes me a member of that organization. If we are enforcing that law apart from your academics, you may have a PhD and you could be a professor, but you have to be a member before you can practice you have to be a member of the institute. Your academic background dictates what you get from the institute. If you read mass communication, they enroll you immediately as a member. But if you have a different academic background like public admin, marketing, sociology, political science, or even English, or business admin, and you want to come to PR, you need to take a diploma examination. You have to take courses. You have to enroll for courses. You have to be certified before to launch into it. So it is a well-structured profession in Nigeria (inaudible word) by law.

What is the purpose of the licensing?

Professionalism. Its just like you are asking why should a medical doctor go for all these specialized courses? Or you are asking why should a medical doctor go for houseman ship for him to be exposed practically and for him to be certified to become a practitioner? Can you be a lawyer without going to law school? You can’t be called to be if you did not go to law school. So it’s the same thing in Nigeria here. The government does not want it to be an all comer affair. So public relations is a profession; it’s a specialized communication field. Because of that there is a regulation. For you to enjoy that profession, you have to go through the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, which I am a member of. Some of my staff that have different backgrounds and are not into PR by training, I force them to pick
forms and last December, at least 8 of them wrote exams for their diploma. So that is the status in Nigeria.

So how many years is your NIPR membership?

This is the 7th year. Actually, I wasn’t serious with it. I am supposed to be a fellow by now. When I first enrolled, because I was doing my thing outside, I didn’t even understand the importance of that institute. Somebody of blessed memory now, a friend of mine, enrolled me, but I didn’t pay the subscription fee, so they delisted my name. When I came here, I saw that I had to be a member. That’s exactly what happened. If not so by now, I’m supposed to be a fellow. I’m a full-fledged member now. We have three categories – we have associate member, to full fledged member, and from full fledged member after some years and depending on your contribution to the field of public relations, then you will become a fellow. So that’s exactly what is happening.

So in what areas have you worked with your public relations practice?

Well, everything centers in the aviation sector. That’s where I practiced my PR even before I came in here.

So for most of the 20 something years, you’ve been in aviation.

I’ve been in aviation. Yes. I came in here as a reporter, as a field journalist. I told you I first trained as a journalist. Here in mass communication – from where I graduated in University of Lagos – we have different fields. In journalism we have two – we have print and electronics. Then in your second or third year is when you choose where you want to go. When you come for your masters, you now choose whether you want to be in journalism, or you want to be in PR, or you want to be in advertising. Actually, we combine the two – PR and advertising. I think that one has changed. People now read PR straight.

So does that mean that there is sort of a growing appreciation for public relations?

Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. People are now realizing that you can now specialize. They now see it as a specialized field. So most universities, even in polytechnics now, you can get a HND or BSC or BA in public relations. Here it is a BSC because it is attached to the faculty of social sciences.

Interesting. So did you receive any training by this organization to be able to practice PR effectively, or was it just your NIPR background?

With your academic exposure and your lecturers who are practitioners, they’ve impacted in us. So that’s the theoretical aspect of it. When you come to
the field you are exposed, and with the trends of development, you keep on adjusting with what you know in a classroom. But meanwhile, let me tell you this. In the NIPR annually, we usually go for conferences and seminars to where we get things as they are unfolding. We are exposed to some debates, conferences, seminars and workshops. It’s a regular thing. Then once in a while we have what you call the annual general meeting. Last December we were in Abuja. Apart from that we have state chapters who often organize workshops and seminars, so this is how we get exposed. Then for this job, people who are consultants can come with a program and hold it anywhere; it can be Lagos, it can be Accra, it can be Kenya, it can be in Dubai, it can even be London. Since I’ve been here I’ve done a few of my courses in PR. If you see, I have some textbooks that I read on my own.

So Sir, how would you define public relations?

I may not give you the textbook definition, but from my own practical experience, I will tell you that PR is about telling what your organization is doing to allow the public to have a kind of awareness of the job you do. Most people don’t know what your organization is doing, so it is your job to allow your environment, your neighbors, your community, and your immediate external public, even you internal publics, know what your organization is about. I will say PR is about even branding. I can even say its marketing. Everything about PR is creating a good and sustainable image for any organization. That is a simple way I will define public relations. What are your tools? Essentially communication. And how do you distribute this communication? It could be on radio, it could be on television, it could be inside a newspaper through a press statement or press release, to create that awareness. I remember when I came here, although the public relations (inaudible word) had been there, I came in with the background of a journalist, so the (inaudible word) of journalism of writing is in me. So what I’m trying to do is to expose, to keep on writing about the organization. Public relations is about creation of good image for your audience or for your organization through communication, simple and sustainable communication for both the internal and external public. In the time past in Nigeria, people believed that public relations was about carrying suitcase for your boss, but we’ve told them that’s not our job. Some people believe that is PR. That one is clear now. So that’s my own simple definition of public relations. Even in a crisis, a PR man should continue to promote the essence of that organization, seeing that it seen in good light by the public. In our agency, our job is to establish and sustain good image for the organization.

So I’ve figured that public relations is not really called public relations. I know a lot of organizations and institutions don’t really call the departments public relations. Do you know the reason for that?
It’s just a matter of semantics and misunderstanding of the concepts of PR. I see PR as a management function. It is a management function, but most of them don’t see it. You’ll be shocked to hear that I hardly attend management meetings, but elsewhere, somebody of my status will be attending management meetings. They will allow a lawyer to attend, but have forgotten that the PR man can give them some management advice and counseling. When you want to bring out a policy the instinct in the PR will tell you the side effect of it. So some people will call it communication, some will call it public affairs, some will call it corporate communication, some will call it media assistance. But actually, in action you will see that they are still doing the same function. Elsewhere you see them merge PR and protocol, but in my own organization we have protocol different. There is no way the PR can function as the Protocol. Protocol is a big job on its own. Let me add this. PR is media centric.

Meaning?

Meaning that whatever you do, it is to allow the company to grow, and the channel you still use is media. That is why I call it media centric. Whatever things I do here, if I don’t push it through the media, nobody will know what we are doing. That is why is ay PR is a media centric job. So it is media centered. That’s what I mean.

So going back to what you said about not attending management meetings; is PR in this organization considered a management function?

That’s what I’m telling you. They don’t see it that way; its just level of understanding. Some of them believe that because you are into communication, anything they say in the meeting will get out. I think that is a lack of understanding of what PR is all about.

So there is an appreciation for the job and the function but there is a lack of understanding about what it really is.

Yeah, on the part of the chief executive. They don’t understand. If they are holding a meeting, they prefer the lawyer to be there, because the lawyer will take notes of the meeting.

The public affairs department is subject to management. Are they also subject to the NIPR?

No. The NIPR is just a professional body.

Okay. Are there rules and regulations within the organization or in the NIPR that are binding on your practice?

Definitely. In any job there are ethics – whether a medical doctor, a PR person, a journalist – there are ethics, code of conducts.
So would you consider public relations to be an occupation or more of a profession and why?

It is both. It is an occupation, and at the same time it is at the professional level. When you are talking about an occupation, it’s simply a job that you engage in, but this one is a specialized field. It is a profession. And that is the essence of having that NIPR act – to make it professional.

So what kind of duties do public relations practitioners in this organization or even in the country perform?

Oh, it depends. The nature of your job will dictate what the PR outfit will be. But globally, we know that PR is to market your agency. It is a marketing communication function. Among the five parts of the marketing mix, public relations must be there, and all of them border on communication. So the global nature of PR is always (inaudible word) to sustain good will, to create awareness for your organization, to see that the publics see your organization in good light. But now, coming to domesticate the function of PR, the nature of your job, the nature of the organization, will dictate that. Like here now, my own media package will be different from someone that is in the banking sector. So your PR function will be as a direct result of the nature of your company’s function. My own PR stuff is quite different from someone who is working in food and beverages. My own function as a PR man will be quite different from someone who is working at Maritime. Our mentality is different, our function is different, our companies are different. So, the kind of communication we push out will be different. Like what I push out here is for the interest of the industry and for the interest of the travellers. So here, our job is air navigation service provision. That’s what we do. If there is any bad press about our agency, we counter them. We write stories, do a press briefing,

So what are some organizational requirements for public relations practitioners? I know you said you’re encouraging them to become members of the NIPR. Are there any other requirements?

You know, when people are looking for jobs, back in the U.S they can be strict about what they want. Here, it can be manipulated. Once I know that someone is a graduate - whether sociology or history – I can bring him. It happens that way. The strict adherence to it is not there. That is why I encouraged my staff – almost 8 of them – to become members of the NIPR. Academically, they are qualified. Professionally, they are not. So for them to be qualified to work in public relations I had to ask them to go and pick NIPR forms and earn a diploma. So if they pass – the one that read sociology or the one that business administration – they will have an extra certificate, which is a diploma in public relations, and which makes them a professional.
So apart from the training that they are receiving by the NIPR, is there any organizational training…

Yeah sure, sure.

What does this entail?

It’s about PR; public relations, media relations, writing for the media, and developing their skills. We are training some of them how to handle cameras, both still and video, and I do all that in-house.

So before they actually come into the organization, are they required to have any kind of certifications?

No. That is how it is supposed to be. But you know, in terms of government anything goes.

Do you think the growing appreciation for public relations, and public relations actually now having a curriculum in some universities is going to change this over time?

Yeah, sure. In fact, most of these NIPR members go to universities and lecture, and some lecturers are members of NIPR. There is no university in Nigeria without mass communication. People are rushing it. After law, medicine, then mass comm.

So how do you think public relations practice in Nigeria compares to public relations practice in western countries or even globally?

It’s the same thing. What separates us is the amount of new technology that is emerging, and education. But we are catching up. We have first class brains in NIPR. We have professional people.

So how do you feel about licensing? I know Nigeria and South Africa are two of the very few, if not the only countries where you have to be licensed to practice public relations.

Well, its not licensing per-say. It’s just a certificate to make you more professional. If I cause problem here as a PR man, one thing the NIPR will ask is if I’m their member, because their member should not be involved in such. We are talking of professionalism. So its not licensing per-say. It’s just a certificate that you need to have to make you more professional. What I’m telling you is that not many organizations go through that. But some organizations when looking for PR professionals to head their department, they put in there that membership in the NIPR is an added advantage. Can you see the difference? So come companies do that.
So are there consequences being enforced for people who are not, since you actually have to be a member of the NIPR to practice?

Actually, by law you are not supposed to even employ somebody that is not qualified. But who is monitoring? There is no enforcement. If I employ someone, will they know somewhere? So that is why people like us, when we see them in the department, we push them to NIPR. And there is an advantage for them, because when they are looking for someone to take the lead, those are the things that separate you from other people. Then apart from that, like our own agency, allowances are given to practitioners. I collect my professional allowance based on my qualifications and my subscription as a member of the NIPR.

So are there any things in the Nigerian environment – in culture or tradition – that affect the practice of public relations?

Uhhhhh…

I have talked to some people who have felt like the issue of the ‘brown envelope,’ or public relations being associated with money exchanging hands, is a little problem and presents some issues. Would you agree with that?

I don’t think it is a problem. Its African culture – meaning that if I invite you to my house and you entertain me, when you are going, I should be able to assist you with transport if you don’t have a vehicle. It’s the culture that has infiltrated into the practice.

Okay, so it is just more of courtesy?

Courtesy. I don’t see it as ‘brown envelope.’ If you go to an African home, a proper African setting, the first thing that and old man will give you, an old woman will give you, or your host will give you, is a cold cup of water to drink to cool you down. So it’s the same thing. Is it the lunch you give to them on assignment that you consider bribe? The ‘brown envelope’ is more permissive in journalism work. And that is another thing separating our practice in Nigeria. People think part of PR is to give people money, which is wrong. It could be a major challenge.

So are there any factors that you are aware of that are responsible for the lack of growth and development of public relations in Nigeria?

There is no lack of growth. Public relations is growing fast in Nigeria. The awareness has been created as a professional entity, as an occupation. So it is growing. There is no organization in the country where you don’t have a public relations practitioner. Many of them have public relations units but its either they call them communications units, or public affairs units. We have them in the ministry, in the federal government agencies; we have them in state government agencies. So it’s growing. All thee big
companies – construction, banking, airlines – have their PR person. Another practice is to contract it out and have a contact man who will be running it.

So in what ways do you think that the government or politics affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

No. I will even say that it is under this section that we are seeing PR really coming out. It’s thriving under this democracy. Even in the military they have spokesmen. Kolade is doing a fantastic job!

Okay, so finally is there anything else you would like to add about public relations practice in Nigeria and professionalism?

I just want to be emphatic now. The practice of public relations in Nigeria is not only emerging. It is thriving. It is booming. The presidency even has two spokesmen – one for media relations and one for public affairs. So if the presidency has it, we can have success in other areas. The practice is thriving. It is professionally handled and professionally practices, and we are guided by our law and ethics. I will say PR is on the front burner in Nigeria. However, the proper utilization of PR persons is not being done in Nigeria. People are yet to grab what they can benefit from that practice.

Thank you so much for your time Sir, I greatly appreciate it.

No problem!

PARTICIPANT 6

How many years of public relations experience have you had, Sir?

I will say I started effectively around year 2000 up till date.

So about 14 years.

Yes.

Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Yeah. I went to the school of journalism. I went to the polytechnic in Ibadan, where I had my HND in mass communication. I majored in public relations. I have a masters certificate in communication arts – master of communication arts at the University of Ibadan. I am also a member of the Nigerian Institute of
Alright. How many years is your membership in the NIPR?

1997 till date [17 years]

And to what level of membership do you belong Sir?

Actually, APCON is associate, while NIPR is member – full member.

Okay. So in what areas have you worked with your public relations experience?

I’ve worked previously in an organization – Odua Group – headquartered in Ibadan. It is owned by the 5 southwest states. I worked as corporate affairs manager and basically, it is a lot like what you do as a head of corporate communications; except that as a corporate communication, it’s more strict in line than being a corporate affairs manager.

So did you have any formal training by the NIPR or by your organization to practice public relations effectively?

I had some short training – not necessarily by NIPR, but by different organizations. There was one that was organized by the British council, which I attended. That’s about it concerning training.

Okay. So Sir, would you please tell me how you would define public relations?

Public relations refers to activities geared towards maintaining and sustaining relationships with your publics, and the publics could be internal staff-board of directors, labor unions – and it could be external – journalists, your clients, regulators, and all that.

Would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

It is a profession. It should be a profession.

Why, Sir?

Well its certificated. Ideally, you shouldn’t practice public relations if you don’t have the required training, and that is why we have a body like NIPR who is mandated to register practitioners and offer training services. You are expected to regularly upgrade your knowledge if you do public relations, and I think they’ve been trying to ensure that quacks don’t infiltrate the profession. It’s more a profession than an occupation.

So how do you feel about Nigeria and South Africa being one of the only, if not the only two countries that actually license public relations practice?
The truth is when I say you need to be certificated I am being theoretical. In practice, a lot of people go into this profession without really having the necessary background. For example, I trained as a journalist, and I worked in the media for about 10 years. There is this impression that if you are a journalist that you could handle the job of public relations, because it is believed that you relate effectively with the top shots in the society, especially politicians, business executives, CEO’s of companies and organizations, and all that. So there is this wrong perception that if you spend a certain number of years in journalism and you know the high and mighty, that you could actually go into public relations. And I think it is a wrong perception. I trained as a journalist, but I also trained as a public relations practitioner because I have the certificate. Besides, in mass communication, I majored in public relations, not really media.

Do you think that is affecting the practice? People without a background in public relations starting to practice?

I think it is. I think it is. For example, when you want to go into some business, trust is essential. They want to give you a brief, and those who are giving you a brief need to now whether you are actually qualified to handle that job. And if somebody is giving you a job that runs into millions of naira, there should be some kind of regulation; some kind of body that could bring it to account, and I think that is the kind of role NIPR is supposed to be playing. But I’m not sure whether they are doing that effectively. If I give you a brief, and you are not knowledgeable enough, or maybe you don’t have the (inaudible word) to handle that job, that public relations consultancy job, and you mess up the job and the money given to you, who do you report to? So those are some of the things that are affecting, or that are impeaching on the integrity on that profession. I don’t think the public relations in Nigeria has developed to the level where there is effective monitoring and control.

So how would you compare public relations practice in Nigeria to public relations practice in western countries, or even globally?

Well, you’ve just given me a hint now that you don’t have to be licensed in some western countries before you practice. I don’t think there is much difference in how the practice is conducted. For example, if in the western countries they are licensed like engineers, like doctors, then you can say that it will be a different ball game. Here, they are meant to be licensed and registered. But the (inaudible word) is not really strong to make this effective. So I will just say that the different will be in terms of the technology and scope. Here, public relations is still growing. Because it is still growing, there is still limitation to the scope of work that can be done in public relations, and I’ll give you an example. In the western world, lobbying is a very good aspect of public relations. A lot of people get hefty pay for doing lobbying in national assembly, and all that among the
government. But here, lobbying is not seen as part of public relations. Anything goes. Unfortunately. And that is why when anybody sends a press release to the media house – a press release for an organization – he thinks he is doing the work of public relations, and which he is not. It a whole gamut of integrated communication activities including press conferences, press releases, media relationships, good community relationships. So it’s a whole lot, which I know that a lot of the guys here are not doing.

And by the guys here, you mean the country?

Yeah, in Nigeria here. It’s a bouquet of communication activities. Media relations is just one of them, but a lot of the guys here believe that media relationship is public relations.

So somehow there is a lack of understanding about what public relations really is?

There is a lack of understanding, but that does not mean that 50-60% of people, especially those who have been in the system and who really went to public relations school, don’t know. They know what the profession is. But there are some people infiltrating the system who really don’t know what it is. So I wouldn’t say there is a total lack of understanding. The understanding of the scope is what is the problem. They know what public relations is, but public relations is far greater than what they think it is.

So does this translate to a kind of lack of appreciation for it on the parts of organizations or the public?

I think there is some kind of appreciation for public relations, but of course the awareness is not much. For example, I had worked in an organization before, and the managing director believed that public relations is just sending press releases to the media. I think its more than that. Then, people also believe that public relations is giving money to journalists, which I think shouldn’t be. If you are the public relations manager of a company, and there is crisis in your organization, the management of that organization believes that you should reach out to the media people to ensure that that bad event doesn’t get reported. I want to believe that that management doesn’t really appreciate the full meaning or concept of public relations. You don’t just wake up in a day and say because you have crisis in your organization it doesn’t get reported in the paper. That is not what public relations means. For you to have good relationships with the media or with your stakeholder you must have been doing certain things. You must have built your own unique profile to be a good corporate citizen. If you do that on a consistent basis, even if you have bad issues or crisis in your organization, already the reputation is built. There is no way companies don’t go into some kind of crises every once in a while. But if you’ve built a reputation of being a good corporate citizen, even if that
story gets reported, there’s is a possibility that you will be given fair hearing. There will be a balance of stories, you know, a balance of views. Lets say there is retrenchment in your organization, and it gets to the media. If you don’t have good relationships with the media, what they are going to report is that your company retrenched, and they can even give a background to that story and say that in these bad times, some companies are still sending out people into the labour market. But if you have a good relationships with the media, the possibility of that report may be that the company is right-sizing to reposition the company, maybe for greater heights, and things like that. This relationship is not something you cultivate in a day. Its something that you have to build over time. So I know that a lot of organizations don’t really appreciate what public relations is, and that is one of the challenges we have in that industry.

So what other factors – apart from the lack of appreciation or the association of public relations with money – do you think, in the culture or tradition, or in the general Nigerian environment, affect the effective practice of public relations?

I don’t know whether we have mentioned training. Training is one, then exposure; exposure to how things are done globally. But of course whatever happens in that profession or industry will be a reflection of what happens in the entire country. For example if there is corruption in the system, then it must have been as a result of corruption in the larger community. If you want to send a press release to an organization, there is an expectation from the journalist that you must support that press release with money. If you don’t support that press release with money, there is a high tendency that that report will not be published. But in a normal setting, that shouldn’t be. I don’t think it happens like that in advanced countries. If you get a press release concerning certain activities in your company, the media is obliged to report if it is of public interest. So I think corruption is also one of the challenges. Of course you understand that a lot of people are poorly paid too, so they want to cut corners to make ends meet. So those are some of the challenges that I see there.

Do you think that education is an issue?

Yeah, it’s an issue. I think it is only one university that is offering public relations at the Masters level.

Which? Do you know?

I think University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I’m not really too sure but you can probably crosscheck. But that says a lot about the profession. Public relations hardly stands alone in higher institutions. It is usually embedded in some other courses like mass communication, like English. It hardly stands alone. So that tells me that education is an issue. What we have basically
are some of these institutes offering the course. Institutes rather than universities.

So is public relations in this organization a whole department, or is it an individual?

See the point is most organizations don’t really have public relations departments these days, and I think it’s also what (inaudible word) in advanced countries. I don’t think most big organizations have public relations departments. What they have these days is corporate communications, corporate affairs, public affairs departments.

Do they perform the same duties, similar duties?

More or less. I think the words ‘public relations’ seem to limit what you can do. For example, if you say corporate affairs, as a corporate affairs person, there are certain things that you can do that are administrative or HR in nature. There are some things that you can do that are more like corporate services duties. There are things that you can also do that are advertising in nature. You know public relations is quite different from advertising. So it’s kind of limiting using the words ‘public relations.’ That is why most organizations use corporate communications, public affairs, etc. But here we have corporate communication, and it’s a whole department with a head who is a senior manager.

Speaking of which, I just about to ask; are public relations practitioners more of management or technician positions?

It’s supposed to be a management function. Public relations activities affect the soul and the image of the organization. Any activity that affects the soul and image of the organization should be a management function, in the sense that if decisions are taken, there should be a short line of communication, or a short line of report. If it is not made a management function, and you just make a public relations unit and have an officer that is there, the officer will have to get to the managing director through some other bosses. It kind of slows down decision making, and public relations, or corporate communications, have decisions that have to be taken as prompt as possible. For example, there was a time we had an issue in our warehouse. There was some ammunition that some people brought in. Actually, it was an officer that discovered the cargo containing the ammunition, and we reported to customs, which is the normal thing we should do. Of course the media people – the journalists – got hold of this and they were to go to press. It was something that you needed to react to promptly; that didn’t need unnecessary high bureaucracy. What I had to do was just (inaudible word) with the managing director, and we just got in touch with the journalists to give our own side of the story. So we didn’t need to climb the ladder before we got through. Such decisions need to
taken by the managing director anyway, that is why it has to be a management function.

Are there any requirements that your organization puts out for public relations practitioners for practice? Are there any kinds of certifications or requirements?

Yeah. Yes. Education of course – you have to do related courses; mass communication, public relations, maybe advertising. But I do know that there are some companies that will even go for an English graduate. I think the best thing is to have an experience, a vast experience in public relations, irrespective of your academic qualification. What most organizations look for in Nigeria, those who proudly have had experience in public relations firms, or media. Basically.

Do they usually look for certification from the NIPR as well?

They do. I mean it’s an added advantage. It’s usually an added advantage because if you belong to NIPR that means you are the professional they are looking for. That’s what it means.

Okay. So are there any rules or regulations within your organization, or through the NIPR that public relations practice has to adhere by? Like a code of ethics?

Well, we don’t have.

Within the organization?

Yeah, we don’t have. But what could have resemblance of that is probably the corporate social responsibility policy. CSR is also a public relations function, and I know that there are even some companies that have it as a full department. I know that a lot of companies have CSR policies because they will determine how you relate with the environment. If you don’t have a good standing with your environment or with your stakeholders, it could (inaudible word) negatively on the performance of the organization. But here we are about formulating such a policy.

I do believe that the NIPR has some kind of code of ethics. Is that binding on the practice in this organization?

It is binding. Well, it is binding on all practitioners, not necessarily on companies.

Regardless of where you work?

Regardless of where you work.
So is there a training process in the organization for practitioners? First time training, on-the-job training, or continuous training within the organization or even externally?

Well, there will always be continuous training within the organization. But you know that the kind of training that will be required here will be kind of different from the kind of training required for a practitioner who works for a public relations consultancy firm. It’s just a department here, but in some other organizations, that’s a full job that you do. And if it is your full job, then I mean, you must have orientation before starting to work with such organizations. But in organizations that have core functions that are not public relations in nature, you are permitted to have occasional training.

Okay. Earlier on I know you mentioned that whatever happens in the profession is a reflection of what happens in the country, and you used corruption as an example. Do you think that the government or politics in any way affects the practice of public relations?

Yeah it does a lot.

And how so, Sir?

It does. A lot. You know, I just told you that there is a misconception of what the functions of public relations are by the larger society. Public relations entails activities meant to project the image of an organization. I think that is the basic thing – to project your image. But if it used to project the image of corrupt people, what ends are you serving? That happens a lot. Those who have embezzled money, confirmed corrupt people – ministers, governors – still use public relations to project their image. They probably want to go for some election or re-election, and then they contract some people to begin to write articles, to begin to write stories, and send to the media houses; organizing some activities where they showcase certain things. That is using public relations negatively.

So kind of like propaganda?

Propaganda. Yeah.

Finally, is there anything else you would like to share with me about public relations practice in Nigeria and professionalism?

One thing I know is that if public relations is conducted the way it should be conducted, if it is conducted professionally, I know that it is going to help this country a lot.

How so?
Things will be put into perspective. Public relations relies on the media as a platform – newspapers, radio, TV. And just like we have mentioned earlier on, if there is a good regulatory agency that can regulate how this practice is done, then we can weed out quacks, and we can ensure that viable facts are the facts that are dished to the public. I know that at the end of the day, it will be all better for the country. If you use public relations negatively, you project the image of a politician, and you write a report on him that he has done so so and so, whereas he has not done such things, you have passed on wrong information, and it keeps going on and on and on like that. And of this person that you have given wrong information about gets to the seat of power, how do you want him to perform? A thief will never change his color. So that's it.

Alright. Thank you so much Sir. I greatly appreciate your time.

It’s okay!

PARTICIPANT 7

Sir, can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you’ve had?

Public relations experience? Maybe from 2003 till now. How long?

About 11 years.

11 years. I have been commissioner of information of the state, I’ve also been an aid to the minister of commerce and industry before coming here.

Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Well, my first degree is in theatre and communication arts from the University of Jos, and I also had a masters in law and diplomacy. The theatre and communication arts was also combined with public relations. We took courses in public relations.

So are you a member of the NIPR, Sir?

No.

Do you ever plan on becoming a member?

I have not seen the necessities.
And why, Sir?

Because I don’t see what they contribute personally.

So it is not very effective at all?

Well I should think they are. But I have not had reason to, and it doesn’t seem to add to what I do. I don’t see it as adding value to what I do. That is not to say that is it irrelevant.

Did you receive any formal training by your organization to be able to practice public relations effectively?

Formal training? I told you I’ve run the image of a state before coming here.

So that was not necessary?

No, I don’t think it was.

So how would you define public relations Sir?

I think public relations is very important and key, even though often times it is a neglected sector. Most times it comes up when people are in crisis; when organizations are in crisis. But generally I believe that public relations are the (inaudible word), because its about perception, and perception is practically everything. Whatever you do, if the perception is negative, you don’t get a positive response. So it’s important to see that.

So would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

I think it’s both. It depends on where you are standing, and it depends on your articulation; your occupation or profession. What is your definition? Because you people from America may come with a different definition.

Well an occupation is something you do for a living – a source of income. Its something you study and then practice. But a profession actually has some certain standards that make it a profession, like a professional association or institution, a body of knowledge, a curriculum, a code of ethics, etc. So would you consider public relations to be a profession in Nigeria?

I don’t know. I’m indifferent.

Okay. Within this organization is public relations a department, or is it more of an individual?

We have corporate communication as a department.
What are some of the duties that are performed?

We manage the image of the organization. We manage the public image and communication flow with both the internal publics – that is the staff and management, and the external publics. There are also key stakeholders, which we also manage. The overall interest is that there should be an easy flow of information and communication, and the aviation sector is a sector that relies heavily on safety; and safety has a lot to do with trust. So a lot of information flow is very key.

Okay. So I do understand that you are general manager, but I will still ask anyway. Would you consider public relations to be more of a management and executive position, or more of a technician position?

It all depends. Gradually we are beginning to see public relations take the center stage of most of our public lives, especially in a democracy where what people see, feel, or perceive goes a long way. So gradually it is beginning to assume a stronger (inaudible word). Most times in the past, the public relations officer was down the ladder. But right now, because of the immense responsibility and the importance, especially in a democracy where perception is very important, it is gradually being recognized and given its (inaudible word) place.

So it’s a growing profession or growing field?

Well I wont be able to put in in your own words.

Okay. But you said there is a growing appreciation for it. So do you think that it is where it should be or do you think that it is still coming up?

It is still coming up. Most sectors in this country are still country, but I believe that it is still growing. It is not fully appreciated in the scheme of things and gradually people are beginning to see the importance. Unfortunately, it is only in the periods of crisis that the public relations officer becomes very important. Ideally, it should be from day one such that you avoid the crisis where you need the public relations manager to manage.

So what factors do you think are responsible for this kind of slow appreciation, or lack of appreciation, or lack of total appreciation for public relations in the country?

I think it has to also do with a growing democracy. Democracy has been short-lived. Under the former era, what people felt or perceived didn’t matter. But now it matters, so it now becomes compulsory that people are concerned about how they are perceived. The issue of also how to have a good liaison with the public, with the (inaudible phrase) is very important. So it’s growing.
Do you think there are any specific factors within the Nigerian environment - maybe in our culture or tradition – that affect the practice of public relations?

I think public relations has been with us ever since. In most of the villages we had the village gong, people who will go round the village to announce - market days they announced, when there was a visitor they announced. So such things have been part of our society. I know that in some traditions in Africa, when you are getting married, you need somebody that will speak on your behalf. That is public relations. Even in the palace of the king there is usually an order that precedes what the chief wants to say. All that is part of public relations. So it’s always been with us. Its just that the packaging is coming in a different form.

Some people have expressed concern over the fact that public relations is synonymously associated with money exchanging hands, and the whole ‘brown envelope’ and bribery thing, and have called it a challenge in the industry. Would you agree?

No, not necessarily. If you look at the African culture for instance, we have a culture of hospitality. Sometimes it gets confusing to a public relations practitioner where to draw the line. It is expected that when you visit somebody, they will definitely give you water to drink, give you food to eat. In certain times you that, and it may be interpreted and brown envelopes. So it’s a challenge to be able to separate the two. We have a culture that appreciates. Sometimes, if somebody does something good to you, there’s always an appreciation. That is part of the culture. But there has to be a line between appreciation and using that to change behavior or perception. So there is a middle point. The intention is very important.

Okay. So how do you think public relations practice in Nigeria compares to public relations practice in western countries or even globally?

Well I believe that globally it is a bit different from what we have in Nigeria. It is not just about public relations practice. Like every other profession, it is still a work in progress. Most times, the dynamics are different but the principles are the same. For instance, out there you may just do your press releases and send them an email, and it is up to the editor to look at it and see whether it is worth printing. But here you have to follow up a bit with personal contacts, and things like that. This is what gives room to some allegations of brown envelopes and the rest. So those are the little distinctions I see. And also the fact that public relations works with the media. So the growth of the media is also relative to how far the public relations officer can perform. At the end of the day, their main agent of reaching out remains the media, so it depends on how receptive the media is; it depends on how the media operates.
I see. In many organizations I have come across, it is not called a public relations department, or public relations unit. It is usually public affairs, or public communication or corporate communication. What do you think is the reason for that?

Well because public relations is a bit restrictive. When you talk of corporate communication, you are doing public relations, and you are doing communications. But when you are talking of just public relations, you are just talking about, as the name entails, relating more with the public. So even though it is a matter of semantics, I think the two can work for the other. But sometimes if you look at (inaudible word) of most international organizations, there is more of the public affairs attending to either the public relations offices or the corporate communications offices. So I think it is a matter of nomenclature.

Alright. So are public relations professionals in this organization subject to any higher authority?

Yes. It is subject to the managing director. We work under the managing director who is the CEO of the organization.

Are the practices here subject to the NIPR at all?

Not really.

Okay. Are there any rules and regulations or codes of ethics that bind the practice of public relations in this organization?

Yeah. There are codes of ethics that bind us, and like I said, corporate communications really meanders into public relations, press relations, media management, and all that. And in every of those sectors there are ethics that protect that. You will end up navigating from one related area to the other.

Are there any organization requirements for incoming public relations practitioners?

A requirement is to go to school, to be relevant, to learn the relevant courses, and I think that’s about it.

Would you require certain degrees, or certain certifications?

Well, you may need to, because you may need related degrees. For instance communications, theatre, the arts, or English – those are related courses. At the end of the day, whatever you practice will depend on the organization you work with. As a public relations officer, you must always be ready to learn or adapt. If you are working with the aviation sector like we do, you need to know a bit about aviation. If you are working with the banking sector, you need to learn a bit about banking. If you are working with a hospital, you need to know a bit about medicine. If you are working
with a shipping company, you need to know a bit about shipping. So its an area where I see having the education requirement as a basis to starting. Its not all the skill you need. It is where you find yourself that you must do a lot of self (inaudible word). If you’re speaking on behalf of a truck manufacturing company for instance, the public sees the truck in you and what you say. They don’t see public relations. They see that organization. So you must be able to translate to that organization. You can come out and just practice public relations. You use your public relations to (inaudible word) and promote whatever organization you’re working for.

Oh okay. So speaking of learning, is there any kind of training that this organization offers for people that are incoming to this field?

Yes. We offer different levels of training to improve staff productivity and enlighten them. We study; we try to teach our staff a lot of skills that are needed.

And is that just internally within the organization, or is there some external training as well?

It is internal and external.

External by whom?

Like we have the television college, we have the film institute in Jos, so those are some of the external ones. We have the Nigerian Union of Journalists Institute.

Okay. So what department in this organization is responsible for making all the difficult decisions?

I think the difficult decisions is the CEO. And it depends on what you mean by difficult decisions.

I mean the very sensitive decisions that need to be made that affect the company.

It’s the CEO. As the public relations officer, the decision is not yours. Yours is to interpret the decision to send the message appropriately. The message comes to you in its raw form, so its up to you as the public relations officer to be able to send it down.

So public relations is part of the process, but they don’t make the decision.

Yeah. As a public relations officer, unless you run a public relations firm, public relations is managing relations with the public. So you are like a merchant of information and you want to sell your product, which is information, so you must make it attractive, make it acceptable – depending on the organization you work with. The policies and the decision are not yours because you are to add value to what is on the ground. That is why for the public relations officer, its one person that can work, unlike other
professions, anywhere. Doctors can only work in hospitals. The pharmacists probably can work only in the pharmacies. But the public relations officer can work in a pharmacy, in a hospital, in a train station, in the university, anywhere.

Finally in what ways do you think the government affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

***Phone call interrupts and he has to leave office. Interview ends here to be able to make next appointment***

PARTICIPANT 8

How many years of public relations experience have you had?

Almost 13 years now.

Okay. Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

In Nigeria, before you are accepted to practice, you must belong to the professional body, which is the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. There are criteria for admission. Its either you are a graduate member – that is you go through their training and of course their exams, and if you pass they give you their certificate and of course induct you. Alternatively, if you are studying in the university or tertiary institutions with pre-requisite qualifications, after you have worked for a number of years you can apply. They have a board and a committee that does the screening and if you are qualified, you get membership. But gone are the days when that was done. They now rely strictly on qualification exams. I first of all practiced as a journalist. Then I left that and I crossed over to the industry, and I started practicing public relations.

So how many years is your NIPR membership? All 13 years?

Yeah, all 13 years. Initially when I applied, they didn’t admit me as a member outright. They granted me what is called associate membership. At the beginning, they felt I hadn’t met the number of years of practice, but I had the qualification quite alright. So they gave me associate membership. After about 5 years thereafter, I applied again, and they considered me for full member. So now I am a full member of the NIPR.
Are there any consequences if you are practicing public relations without being a member of the NIPR?

Well, there are consequences. Its just that there is no serious sanction like you have in the NMA. Public relations is not as firm as the health sector or the medical practice. They still tolerate it here and there because it hasn’t gotten to the point where if you don’t belong, you don’t practice. That is why that sanction has not been effective. But then I know if you don’t belong, you can’t lay claim to be a PR practitioner. So that is just what I think is there for now. They do as much as possible to spread the message.

So in what areas have you worked with your public relations practice?

I started my public relations practice basically with this organization. All my PR practice has been here.

Okay. Can you give me an idea of what you do with public relations in this company?

Let me start from the major thing – the image making sort of; being a spokesperson; issuing news releases; we do that often. Then we try to (inaudible word) the public about our activities and try to win support, understanding, goodwill. Of course another area is media relations, and it is central to our operation because we are an organization that has worked behind the scenes. Its only when things go wrong that people get to see us. So that is why as much as possible, we try to highlight whatever we are doing from behind. We have FAA and of course they are the ones that oversee the operation of that aircraft. Whoever is going to fly as a pilot from an airplane must have a license we issue and its that license that we issue that we use to regulate the system to ensure compliance. The aircraft must be fit to fly, the person flying it must be qualified and fit. Even the environment in which the aircraft is flying must have certain standards which is universal. Even the airport you fly into is certificated. In other words, if you don’t meet the requirements, that license is withdrawn, and if it is withdrawn you cannot operate.

I see. So do you have your undergraduate or graduate degree in public relations?

No. I read mass communication. I specialized in print journalism. Public relations is just an aspect of mass comm. I didn’t fully specialize in PR as a major. I specialized in print journalism.

Did you receive any formal training by your organization or the NIPR to be able to practice public relations effectively?

From time to time, yeah. In fact, on annual basis. We subscribe to the NIPR because they have workshops and training programs for as long as one or two weeks. We have even international ones.
How valuable do you consider these trainings?

Very very. You know you can’t begin to rely on what you gathered from university only. It’s just a general knowledge base. But in the practice on the field you meet other people. Training is a continuous thing. Very valuable.

So would you please tell me how you would define public relations?

Public relations is a practice to engender understanding of the publics.

Would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

It's a profession.

And why, Sir?

Because every profession requires some level of qualification. It requires some level of knowledge skill and professionalism. It shouldn’t be for all comers. Before I came into the system in the business, people tend to make us believe that public relations is about lying. I have been in this organization for about 13 years, and I have never lied one day. Nobody has ever asked me to go and lie to the public. It has never happened. So if you find yourself in an organization that wants to do things right, there won’t be basis to lie. You admit what is wrong, and tell people what to do to correct it. But if I didn’t have training, then I can afford to do anything.

So speaking of this, a lot of people have expressed some concern about public relations being synonymous with the ‘brown envelope’ or money exchanging hands, and some have called it a challenge for the profession. What do you have to say about that?

Again I disagree with that. I’m not saying its not happening. It’s happening. The brown envelope syndrome has a negative connotation. There is no profession where you don’t show appreciation to people. The hamper – which is an English thing – is appreciation. At the end of the year when you want to show appreciation to somebody, an airline can choose to give out something to passengers, values customers. Who calls that bribe? They don’t call it brown envelope. They see it as something good; positive. I like public relations where if I see somebody in a need, without being told, without them asking, we move in. it could be any need. We move in and we tackle in a way within our affordability; a way our budget can carry. We practiced that, and it worked. For example people we relating with, in our own little way we come in if any of them is getting married, etc. We come in, give them money for wedding, or buy a gift. Something like that that they will value. That is our own practice. If someone is planning a burial, we know he needs cash. Even if he doesn’t ask us, we come in. we’ll be there and give our little token. These are things that we put in place as unannounced policies and religiously, we practice them. So many
practitioners think that journalists don’t work in your favor until you give them brown envelope. Let me tell you how it works with us. We give them the information that they need. All the journalist is looking for is information. The syndrome is people that are applying it wrongly. So they pursue that at the expense of the real professional thing, and at the end of the day they don’t get results. So it depends on the value. Give the people what they need. We all need money but that is not the primary thing.

So in this organization, what positions do public relations practitioners typically hold? Is it an executive management position, or…

It is a management position. We have a GM. I am not the overall head. I am next to the overall head. We report directly to the CEO.

So is your department part of the overall decision making of the organization?

Yeah – in a way. At the management meetings, of course that is where decisions are taken, so the GM is there. Assuming we are going to have a management meeting now, I will be there, which means I will have to contribute. But it wasn’t so at the beginning.

So what changed?

It is now that it is allowed. It is evolving. It wasn’t so at the beginning. That is the trouble we have in this part of the world. It’s not every organization that sees PR as a profession. Some people just see it as maybe someone that will buy them tickets to fly, or someone that will be arranging hotel accommodation. These are duties that we handle within our units – we have publications, we have media, we have events, we have protocols and passages. So we have them as units. There are 21 of us.

So it’s a department?

Yes, it is.

And what is the department called?

Public Relations, but we are trying to change it now to public affairs.

Yes. I have come across a lot of organizations where it is called public affairs, or public communication, and I want to know; what is the reason for that?

Those who call it so have not given us any reason other than they think it should be given a wider scope. I have asked this question – like what is public affairs and why is it different from public relations? The wider scope is the only way they have been able to justify that. I think the corporate organizations, particularly the private enterprises, came in with that idea. This is a government agency, and government agencies are used to the old order.
Of course the private organizations are coming up with corporate communications, public affairs, but they have not been able to give us the real meaning, nor why.

Is it that there is a lack of understanding of the scope of public relations, or there is a lack of appreciation for the profession?

No. I don’t think so. The issue is just wanting to belong to the modern trend; trying to copy what you see going on that is good for you. I don’t think its lack of understanding. I don’t think so.

So what are your organizational requirements from public relations practitioners for the practice? Are they required to have any kind of certifications or qualifications before they are employed in your organization?

Well, not really. We have general principles of (inaudible word) which of course – is you better be a graduate, and train. Every staff of this place is subject to auditing – auditing that is international in nature, such that if you have a staff that is not qualified to be on your pay roll, it may affect the ratings in the international aviation scheme. So we cant afford to harbor any staff that is not qualified to man whatever duties they are assigned. We cannot afford to do that. So the baseline is, you must have a degree to start with. Now when people apply from time to time, they are posted to areas where their core competence lies.

You talk about training, so is there a training process that this organization provides, and do they have to go through NIPR or…

No, we have a training process. In fact, our capital project in this organization in on training. The chunk of our budget every year goes into training of staff, and the reason being that we are not a service provider. You that is going to issue a certificate or license to someone else, before you operate, you have to be qualified. We have structured programs according to our training needs and they are budgeted for.

So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or even globally?

Well, we have a long way to go. In Nigeria, it could be better. There are a lot of challenges. Not many organizations have embraced it. It is crisis that makes some organizations in Nigeria to embrace it. Too bad it has to be the hard way. It is better that you have it with a deep understanding from day one. Among those of them who embrace, not many of them give PR a place with respect to the place at which it should be within an organizational structure. Many of them do not recognize PR to be a management function, so it affects the practice. These are things that we
are still facing. Then of course, the level of budgets made available, and the technology too. The era in which we are is a technology era – the era of the Internet. Those are some challenges, and that is why I have said we have a long way to go. It is good that we have started. It is not as if it is new in Nigeria. It has been there, but the development, evolution and organization differs, and the pace is slower in some organizations.

So do you think that there is a lack of growth and development of public relations, or do you think that it is effectively growing steadily?

It is growing, just at a slow pace. It is developing too. It is evolving, but it is slow.

And what would you say is responsible for that slow progress?

The slow progress? Again, leadership. Once the leader doesn’t buy into it, then of course it slows down your own duties. Most of the time in this part of the world, people see public relations as someone who is a spender. They don’t see you as productive. They make your budget 10,000 naira, you tell them you need 20, and they ask what for. A crisis then happens and they say make it 150. So why must you have crisis before you can be appreciated and given money for your function? So that is exactly what happens in Nigeria. They just see you as a spender and not someone who contributes anything. When they don’t have crisis, they don’t see you as valuable. So some people – practitioners – ignorantly engineer crisis so that they can be appreciated, which is wrong.

So do you think that the government or politics affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria in any way?

Of course yes.

And how, would you say?

Even at the government level, we have public relations. What affects PR is leadership at every level.

Finally, is there anything else you would like to share with me about the practice of public relations in Nigeria as it regards to professionalism?

I just wish that every organization in Nigeria will embrace public relations practice – the right practice. When I was in school, I used to tell my friends that when I graduated, I would practice journalism of esteem. And that has been my practice.

Well thank you so much for your time, Sir. I greatly appreciate it.

You’re welcome.
PARTICIPANT 9

Sir, can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you’ve had?
10 years.

Do you have any certifications or qualifications for your public relations practice?
I am a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

And how many years is your membership Sir?
9 years.

And to what level of membership do you belong?
I’m not yet a fellow; I’m just a member.

So in what areas have you practiced public relations?
In the corporate sector.

Do you have an undergraduate or graduate degree in public relations?
No.

What was your undergraduate degree in please?
I did a first degree in history, and then I did a masters in mass communication, but not specifically in public relations.

Okay. So how did you end up in public relations?
I started as a journalist and worked for 2 or 3 years as a journalist, and I then sought for a job in public relations – in media relations – which I got and then decided to become a professional.

So did you receive any formal training by this organization, or by the NIPR to be able to practice public relations effectively?
I have been attending a lot of courses by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. Almost every year, I attend one or two courses by the institute.

Did your organization train you in any way to be able to practice or no?
They pay for my trainings.

Okay. So Sir, how would you define public relations?
Public relations to me, is that job function that allows you to coordinate relationships between your organization and its publics. It allows you to assist the growth of your organization by creating an environment of conduciveness, and environment of understanding between her and the various stakeholders.

So Sir, would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

It should be a profession.

It ‘should be’?

It should be a profession. What I don’t know is if it has really become a profession. Why I say so is this. Perhaps what I am saying may run contrary to the feelings of those at the hems of affairs of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. I am sure they will like to run with the fact that it is a profession. What I was taught in the university was that for a line of practice to become a profession, you must put in a minimum of 14 or 16 years of academic work, starting from your primary school. You do 6 years of primary education, you do another 6 years of secondary education, then you get into the tertiary level of learning and do a minimum of 3 / 4 years of learning, and that will put you in the stem to become a professional. So in Nigeria, those who become public relations practitioners, have they gone through this? Yes and no. Yes, in that a lot of us have gone through primary education, we have gone through secondary education, and we have gone through tertiary education; which gives a minimum of 14/16 years of learning. But no, because the direction of study has not, in most cases, moved towards public relations activities or learning. For instance, I just told you I did my first degree in history and I did my masters in mass communication, which although it has relationship with public relations, is not wholly public relations. Public relations is only an aspect of mass communication studies in the Nigerian university system. I am not aware, maybe there are right now, of institutions that are offering courses on public relations alone. Maybe there are, but as much as I knew, by the time I finished, there were no institutions offering public relations courses at the tertiary level. Of course there is the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, which gives some kind of certification – sometimes two year certifications, sometimes diploma certifications. But can we actually approximate that to 4 years of learning that will lead you to become a professional? Another way to (inaudible word) is that maybe when you’ve finished with the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, or any other related learning in the university system, in the polytechnic system, in any other system, you now go through certifications in the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations; you go through certifications, you go through some examinations that they conduct. Perhaps, to that extent, there is a profession. Perhaps to that extent there is adequate learning to become a professional public relations practitioner. But I think we need a little more
articulation in terms of making the profession of public relations in Nigeria. We really need to create a whole body of study that has a public relations curriculum that will lead you to a certification. I’m not particular with the degree, but a certification that has given you a requisite number of years of study for which, eventually, you come out as a public relations practitioner.

Okay. So Sir, what positions do public relations practitioners typically hold within this organization? Is it more of a management executive kind of position, or is it more of a technician position?

In my company?

Yes.

There is only one position for a public relations practitioner, which I occupy.

And is this a management position?

Yes.

Okay. Does that mean that the position of the public relations practitioner is one person, or it’s a whole department?

It’s a unit, which reports directly to the managing director. Only, it is (inaudible word) by a lot of workers. In fact, it is not particularly called a public relations unit. We describe it as corporate affairs. Under corporate affairs, you deal with a lot of public relations issues. So the organization looks at positions from what it wants to benefit. What do we want? What service do we want this person to offer? Is it just public relations? Are there added functions that may not be public relations that the person can offer? Yes, essentially, the body of work is public relations. But there are still other issues you may have to handle at management levels and so on that may not be public relations, so we don’t call it public relations. We call it corporate affairs. I am aware also, that in most organizations in Nigeria, we have corporate affairs, corporate communication, public affairs, and so on.

So would this be the reason why? Because they cover much more than just public relations?

Because they cover much more than just public relations. Yes.

Okay. So you said that the public relations manager reports directly to the managing director. Are they subject to any other authorities outside the organization such as the NIPR?
Like I said, I am a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. As a member, I am subject to whatever the NIPR does. I mean, you have to obey the rules of the organization. It’s a chartered body.

Okay. So that means that you are bound by the code of ethics of the NIPR.

Oh, of course. Of course.

Is there an organizational code of ethics that your public relations practice is also bound by?

As an organization, we have codes of ethics; we have codes of conduct. It might not be identified as the public relations code of conduct, but for your position, you know the ethics that govern what you are doing. But as a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, I am under the directives of the NIPR to go with the codes of conduct. As a member of this company, I also have to keep to the code of conduct or behavior of workers in this company, the do’s and the don’ts.

Okay. So I do understand that to be able to practice public relations, you have to be part of the NIPR, or you’re supposed to be a member.

Yeah, NIPR has been working towards that. But I am not too sure they have effectively taken control. NIPR, I am not sure, has that control on who is employed in certain positions or not. For instance, for us to employ a chief accountant, he must be a chartered accountant. If we want to have an auditor, he must be a chartered accountant. But I’m not sure that if this organization decides tomorrow to employ a non-member of the NIPR, NIPR has any instrument to enforce that you must hire a public relations practitioner. However, in my organization, it is mandatory for you to perform the functions of public relations; for you to belong to the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. If at the time of entry, you have not become one, you are given the opportunity within a specific time to become a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. So if the NIPR can get other bodies to follow that practice, I think eventually they will get there; they will be able to enforce public relations as a profession that organizations or corporate bodies will respect.

Okay. You talk about how in this organization it is a requirement for them to be part of the NIPR. Are there any other organizational requirements, certification, or qualifications for public relations practitioners that are hired?

Of course you must be a graduate. You must have worked a certain number of years in certain areas of practice. Then besides that, I don’t know of any other thing. Like I said, for every work position in my organization, there are specs on what that position requires. So for public relations – a graduate, a number of years of experience in practice in some areas, and membership of the NIPR - these are some of the specs.
Does it matter what degree you have or no? or is it a plus to have some certain degrees?

It could be a plus to have a degree in mass communication, but I’m not sure it’s a requirement that you should have a degree in the humanities, in the sciences, or anywhere. You could be a biochemist person and veer into public relations practice, provided you have the requisite, cognate experience that will enable you to perform that function, and of course if you are willing to be a Nigerian Institute of Public Relations member.

Okay. I have talked to a number of people who also do not have a specific degree requirement for hiring. Does this go back to what you said about a lack of appropriate curriculum for public relations? Do you think that this could be the reason why there is no specific degree requirements for a lot of companies that want to hire public relations people?

Not really. I said earlier that there is no body of knowledge for public relations in Nigeria. So organizations have a problem in saying you must have studied public relations in the university. Such a thing does not exist. But if you have studied any other course, and you are inclined towards public relations, and you become a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, and you can show cognate experience in that practice, why not?

So since there is no real body of knowledge, is there a training process that they go through when they come to your organization, even though they might have had prior relevant experiences?

For every staff that is employed, we have a training process. Like I said, I attend courses at the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations every year paid for by this organization. So you are encouraged to do your professional trainings. In fact, the organization pays my professional fees. You are encouraged to do your professional trainings, but sometimes you may have to find the courses yourself.

So majority of these courses are external by other providers, but the organization takes the burden of sponsoring the activities.

Yes, yes.

What department in this organization is responsible for making the very sensitive decisions that affect the company?

The company has a board, and it oversees policy. Below the board we have the managing director who works with an executive committee. Below that is the management committee. So these are levels of authority in the organization. These are levels of policy, decision-making, and so on. The management, the executive committee and the board make different levels of decisions. The day to day running of the company lies on the
management committee. The executive committee is just an extended form of the management committee. But each of these units make different levels of decisions as the need arises.

Are you as the public relations manager part of any of these processes?

Yes. Management.

Okay. So Sir, please how do you think public relations practice in Nigeria compares to public relations practice in western countries or even globally?

Favorably.

Ok. How so?

Why I say favorably is that you see, any work you do, you do within the context of your environment. So if it runs contrary to the context of your environment, then something is wrong with your practice. If I am a public relations practitioner in the UK or in the US, there will be different approaches to my job functions. That is because the work environment in the UK or in the US will be different from what I experience here. So to that extent, your public relations practice are in context with the environment in which you find yourself working. So it does not make the PR practitioner in UK or in US better than the PR practitioner in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the practitioner in Nigeria has more challenges, and the fact that he still has to cope with his work despite those challenges, despite those expectations that are not right, means that he has to put in more effort in making sure that he presents his organization in a better way. We say if the public relations person does his work, others skip theirs. It is when you do your work well that things will be moving well with the organization – no criticisms in the media, no societal misgivings about your organization, no riots, no strikes, etc., because you have tried to contend different publics, and others will just keep running their routine the way they do. Most of the time, organizations remember the public relations practitioner when there is a problem. You are always forgotten because there is no problem and every body is thinking in terms of naira and kobo. How much turnover have we made? How much profit have we made? And because you are not directly in line with that making of profit, you tend not to matter. But when there is a problem, you are called to clean the shit.

So this is because public relations doesn’t bring direct profit that they are sometimes sidelined? What is the reason that sometimes public relations professionals are usually not in the fore front of the organization until a crisis happens?
Because people are thinking more of naira and kobo. When I say the practitioners in the UK and US will have a different experience, it is because his organization of course is profit making but there is a little more stability in the business environment; in the operational environment. The company knows where it is going, it can estimate, make budgets, work towards it and achieve it. But here, anything can go wrong anytime. You may budget to make 10 billion naira and before you know it there’s strike for 9 months, or some part of the country is cut off from the rest of the country, and your good cannot get there. At the end of the year, the Chief Executive is after the report he is going to present to the to the board. How much have we made? How much profit? Can we give dividends? So when you bring your bills as a public relations person, you have to wait. So there are challenges there are issues. But the public relations practitioner in Nigeria is doing his very best because the circumstances are not very conducive. In the first place, perception is an issue. A lot of chief executives don’t even know what public relations practice is all about. A lot of companies don’t even understand it. For chief executives, it is a man-Friday job – the man who can be called anytime to do any small work. To some it is the man who comes to serve tea and coffee, or who helps me to fetch some persons when I want to relax with some guests. But it has nothing to do with all those. That has nothing to do with public relations practice. Sometimes we forget that it is the job function of the public relations practitioner to put the company in a position that will help it to make even more profit. Because good-will is an essential ingredient for business success, and the critical work for the public relations officer is to build good-will. If you are able to build good will for an organization, the sky is the limit. Any organization that has good will is only required to ensure that it has good products, and make profit for the books; make turnover for the books. But a lot of people do not relate goodwill to turnover; they don’t relate goodwill to profit. They only think that the money keeps going. So most of the time you see marketing people are being compensated better than public relations people, because as far as the organization is concerned, those are the people bringing in the money.

Exactly. So are there any other factors in the environment – culturally or traditionally – that positively or negatively affect the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

There are some cultural hindrances. Cultural in the sense that people see different jobs with different --. For instance, if I’m a public relations person in an oil company, once in a while, there is a spill, and they have to deal with communities who give different reasons, ask for different things, who make different demands. You want to be professional in terms of what your organization can do and what it cannot do – the ethics. How do you handle some of these things? And of course, expectations in our environment --. Our people always often expect too much, and that is also one of the reasons why we have corruption. When you expect too much
from the people who you think have become successful, for them to meet up they have to do something outside the books. So when you expect too much from organizations, sometimes, they also look for easy ways out to cover up. So these are little challenges that affect the works of a public relations person because sometimes he has to deal with the community, sometimes it has to do with the government. People make expectations that are sometimes outside the ethics organization. How do you reconcile what people are asking you to do and what your company can do? For instance, you are working the media and the boys want some money before they can give you good press; how do you deal with that? What do you do? Sometimes, even when the organization can’t do it, you may have to do it from your personal position to make sure you keep your job.

Speaking of this, I know that in many parts of the country, public relations is associated synonymously with the brown envelope, or with money exchanging hands and things like that. So how exactly do you feel about that? Do you think that it’s a thing of courtesy that our culture does, or do you think that it’s a challenge to the profession?

It’s a challenge to the profession. Expectations are different from what should be. People are expecting you to bring brown envelopes and all matter of things. For instance, we have a policy not to give money to journalists, but many of them will not understand. I had an experience where a journalist almost slapped me at an event. Reason – because I am not representing them adequately before my management. How is it that I am explaining that I cannot offer them money at an event? How do they go home? So, expectations are different from what the rules should be.

And these expectations are just part of our society?

They are part of our society; part of our culture. People will not understand why you – that is why I said it cultural. When you start explaining, they feel you should already know that you are supposed to give them something. So it is cultural. It has become more of a tradition, and it’s a challenge. When you come back to your office, how do you put in on paper? How do you justify it? You can’t. In our annual budget, we don’t have anything like public relations budget. What I mean by that is, in Nigeria public relations is, like you said, the brown envelope. So when you write anything PR on a budget, audit will return it. That means you are giving bribe. So our organization will not accept any cost or expense that you tag public relations because the understanding is that it is bribe.

So do you think that there is a lack of growth and development of the profession in Nigeria as a result of some of these issues, or do you think that the profession is steadily growing and rising above such situations?
Gradually it will get out of there, but the velocity is slow. Public relations is not growing as much as other professional disciplines. The accountants are there, the engineers are there, other groups are on top. They dictate to organizations what they must employ. Public relations is not growing at the same pace, and that has a relationship with what is aid earlier – that we do not bring in the cash. In most organizations you cant see the public relations person rising to become the chief executive. In fact, in a lot of organizations, especially the banks, there are bars for the public relations practitioner.

So you cant go beyond a certain point.

You can’t go beyond a certain level. Maybe you’ll come in from somewhere and they offer you something that looks like good money so you take it. At a point you begin to get frustrated because you see the young small people you interviewed becoming directors; becoming general managers. I don’t know how many banks in Nigeria in which a public relations or public affairs person can become a general manager. Find out. The highest I have known is a deputy general manager. Or it once happened in Union Bank or so, and it was after SO many years that one of our members was made a general manager. It was epic! The stories were told. The man had served in the bank for donkey years. Everybody knew his name. Everybody knew him. Almost every other director had worked under him before the grudgingly made him a general manager, and then retired him. So I’m not sure any other person has become a general manager at that level. The growth is limited. When your career growth in an organization where you work is limited and stunted, then there is a problem. One of the questions I asked when I came for an interview here is can I become the CEO?

What answer were you given Sir?

Let’s forget that issue.

BOTH LAUGH

Most of the time, growth is very slow and limited. People want to go into areas of practice where they know they have prospects to get to the top. If you are in a profession that cannot take you to the top then there is a problem. If you want to become a managing director in most thriving organizations in this country, you may have to leave public relations. That’s why a lot of those who started in public affairs, change from corporate affairs and public relations into the operational side before they can now aspire to get higher.

So do you think that the government or politics in Nigeria affects the practice of public relations in any way?
Everything affects everything. Corporate public relations may not be directly affected by government actions or politics. But of course, in practice there are certain relationships you have with government that may influence public relations practice. If policies are being made that may not work in the best interest of your organization, it is your duty to follow up with relevant pressure groups to be able to put up with government to ensure that the right things are done and the interest of your organization is maintained within the larger group. But you know there is also public relations practice in government. Public relations practice in government is also a different ball game because the civil servant works according to the dictates of the politics of the day. So the public relations practitioner in public service is a public servant. So whatever is his practice, it is within the ambience of whatever the government of the day is singing; or what the politics of the day dictates.

So finally Sir, is there anything else you would like to add or tell me about public relations practice in Nigeria with regards to professionalism?

I don’t know what we have not talked about, but what I will say is that I want to see public relations grow into a formidable body that will influence the rise, the fortunes of its members positively to be able to aspire to any position both in government and in the private sector. I want to see public relations affect and influence the policies of companies and the government. Because if we do public relations right, the perception about Nigeria will be different. Right now we don’t have any impute in government affairs; no direct impute. You are in the US and I’m sure a lot of people in the US don’t have so much positive thinking, positive orientation, positive perception about Nigeria.

That’s absolutely true.

And I think public relations can do quite a lot to change that. What about bringing in public relations practice in our legislative bodies, in our executive bodies, to give some kind of feeling to the activities? Some kind of planning? Yes, you do all the press releases, and media relations, but if there is no planning in terms of public relations practice, if there is no deliberate effort to present ourselves to the outside world in a more positive outlook, nobody is going to do it on our behalf. You do not expect the American or the British to begin to write positively about you. It is in their best interest that they talk negatively about you. So why would they deliberately decide to change their perception of you when their citizens would like to read about the negative things? It doesn’t happen that way. So if public relations practitioners are incorporated in government planning, then we should be able to let the outside world see us from a different perspective.

Thank you so much Sir!
You’re very welcome.

PARTICIPANT 10

Sir, can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you have had?

Well I don’t know how best to begin to even look at the number of years because all my life I’ve been in communication – from journalism, and eventually PR. Effective PR practice is about 12 years, but before then I have been in journalism and advertising.

So do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Essentially yes, because according to the law you can’t practice it if you’re not registered at the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. So in terms of professional certification, yes I am a member of the NIPR.

And how many years have you been a member Sir?

Well I said I started out in communications. With NIPR I started out in 1989, but as of that time it wasn’t really strong. So I just did some kind of registration to fulfill all righteousness and I never got involved in whatever it was that they were doing. When I moved into full-scale journalism, I was now more active as a member of the Nigerian Union of Journalists. After I crossed over to public relations, I got involved with NIPR again. But I didn’t officially finish my registration until I think 2007; just to conform with the law and get registered. Same thing with advertising. I have not upgraded to full membership. What does the law say? Get registered. And I am registered. Classification of membership? I am not really bothered about that. But again, I think I’m taking a more personal or professional view of it. By the time I started out, quite a number of people who are full members, who are almost becoming fellows and everything had not even started practice. This year, maybe I think I will upgrade just for the hell of it.

And this is the NIPR we are talking about, yeah?

Yes. The NIPR.

Ok. So do you have a graduate or undergraduate degree in public relations?

I have a masters in mass communication – advertising and PR.
And what was your undergraduate degree in?

English

Okay. Do you have any formal training by the NIPR or your organization – public relations training?

Well we did a lot of hands-on training at the Quadrant company, which is Nigeria’s biggest PR consultancy, and now maybe that could be disputed if you look at the practice. But in terms of actual professional practice, I would still say the Quadrant is the biggest.

Is it international?

It is the first professional PR agency in Nigeria. It is affiliated with Fleishman Hillard. So there was national and international exposure. We got sent on professional training programs, such as some offered by the Lagos Business School. At one time, all the management staff attended what we call the SMP – the senior management program of the Lagos Business School. That is just so that you have both managerial and professional experience. So yes, quite a number of those, and I intend to to a bit more this year – attend if not facilitate.

Okay. So did you do any with the NIPR at all?

NIPR, no.

Okay. The trainings that you did get involved in, how valuable did you consider them?

Well, we usually assess the quality of each program before we send participants, and to that extent, we want to look at what exactly the objectives are that we hope to accomplish. So we look at that given year and once we find that the programs match our own objectives. Again, that derives from the group philosophy. One of the key things that the group stresses all the time is that if you are to be positioned for business in any given year, you just have to train your people. Training was number 1. Paying well was also a critical factor. The chairman likes to say that you are ill prepared for business of you do not pay your people well, and if you don’t train them well. Here you find that, in Nigeria most of the time, employers get to be scared of spending so much on training for the basic fact that they spend this amount of money on this employee and then he has to go. Its only a mal adjusted employer that will take that kind of short term view. If you train, even if the guy is spending just one day with you after the training program, he is able to put in whatever he has learned. And when you look at it in percentile terms or whatever quantum, you will have achieved something. So training was always on the board, and here I believe that I should be able to replicate that. Maybe not in the scope in terms of the
naira that is to be spent, but of course we are still crawling, so whatever it takes we will have to do.

So Sir, how would you define public relations?

I guess the universal definition has more to do with what we know as the Mexican statement – that is, it is the art and science of anticipating trends, being able to advice management, and then being able to determine outcomes so that you are not at the mercy of things just happening to you. You make a deliberate attempt to shape perception. So that’s the way I look at it. From a more non professional stand point, I will just tell a typical client that what I do basically is to ensure that you put up your best behavior so that you are correctly perceived. There is no noise in the kind of message that you are trying to put out. I say that because there is a lot of misconception of what PR is in Nigeria. For some people, especially politicians, PR is nothing over and above carrying money in what we call the Ghana-must-go, and I think I need something from you; you take the money and give me the result. That is PR. There is a company called the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria NAFCO. At some point, I believe I’m right, the entire PR department of that company was cropped. It was a federal government institution, and they found that the quantum of money moved in the name of PR was mind bugling. I was like what exactly are you PR-ing that you are moving this kind of money? So it was more of money underhand things and stuff like that. That is PR. Most of what passes for PR is nothing over and above when the MD wants to travel, you ensure that you get his ticket, air passage, and things like that. It was more in terms of protocol. Or in another sense, its in terms of making sure that girls are at the parties, that the drinks are never in short supply, and all that; never in the core communication perspective. That is because of the way the society itself is kind of structured – in the sense that boom; company A ands itself in a mess. How do you deal with it? Carry money to the media boys, give them money and they will write the story from your perspective. So it has happened a whole lot of the time, so organizations question the need for a PR person. PR people just spend money. We cant quantify what they are doing. We just see them in nice suits, speaking good English, but beyond that, there’s nothing. So there is a perception problem; that even till date, the activities of practitioners have not really done much to change that perception. You find that the people who manage information, especially if you look at it from the public sector, the people who manage information for government are more like, whoever. Just this week, the ministry announced the new head of PR. He had a degree in physics, and I think he had an MBA. Maybe they looked at him and said oh, you talk sharp; you sound somewhat logical, so you should manage the PR function. Chances are that he could have had one or two grounding in PR, but then if you look at it from purely an academic point of view, like they say, landing on the moon doesn’t get you nearer to God. The fact that you’ve missed with PR practitioners doesn’t exactly make
you a PR person. So there is still that problem with the profession as it were.

So would you see this as a factor that plays into the lack of growth and development of the profession in Nigeria?

In a way, yes. Because if you are to compare PR practice with other chartered professions, I don’t think we are there at all. But they are trying. NIPR is trying. Every year it’s constantly kind of re-engineering; trying to get more people to understand what PR is all about. But the problem with it is that there is still, even from a human resource point of view, there is this challenge of rather than looking for people who have PR certifications, organizations are basically looking for journalists. So what then happens is that a company has issues, positive or negative, and an admin officer is handling communication. When these issues come up, the management now feels like it is beyond an admin officer and look for a PR officer. In trying to recruit, the first thing is trying to recall a journalist that was of help when they were previously trying to communicate a message. The first thing he does when he gets there is issuing a press release or a hold a press conference. Strategy is missing. The rigor of strategy is not there because the orientation is basically news news, news, journalists, journalists, journalists. That clearly is something that the profession itself has to very much address. I’m sure by the time you go round everybody you will have different outlooks as it were, of what they think PR is. But one thing I am very confident you will come up with is that a lot of people are likely to see PR from the media relations perspective, and that is what is really happening in practice in today. So if you look at consultancies, most of what they offer is basic media relations. It is only now that some are trying to go into the new media and all of that. But even when you go to the new media, you can even justify brick and mortar; you are now talking about clicking. So there is a problem. The client you are talking to wants to look at how many media mentions did I get? And you are now saying go into the stratosphere. It’s something that has to be addressed from within.

And by within you mean?

NIPR. Professionals need to be more active. Well this is a bit of a self-indictment. How many times have I attended NIPR functions? Clearly, no doubts about that. But if professionals begin to look more inwards to see how we can better the kind of choices we have made for our bread and butter then I think we will get there somehow. There – I don’t know where it is. For me it is a matter of respect. Interestingly the founder of the Troiker group was trained as a PR practitioner. He started work in an agency and within two weeks of practicing PR he left PR. He handled an event and the event was not very well managed by the media. So he told himself that if his growth professionally was going to be determined by third parties who
really don’t understand what he does, then he is better off opting out of it. As time went on when the group started to get bigger, of course with his own training and global perspective, he was able to sit himself. A serious communications group cannot operate without a PR outfit within it, so that’s how the Quadrant as a full-fledged PR agency came about. So things like that will always come up from time to time.

So are there any other factors – whether culturally, traditionally, politically, even socially – in the Nigerian environment that you think affect public relations in Nigeria positively or negatively?

From my own perspective, we can’t strictly look at it as cultural or political factors impacting the profession. I think the way it started out is what has been the thing dragging it down a bit. People got seconded – like just called on to go and do PR. And the way the earlier practitioners defined it, is what current practitioners are trying to move away from. One can’t really tie it down to cultural factors or others. It is something we met on the ground and that is the way it is. So it is up to practitioners now to be able to say that if they have to go by modern trend, this thing has moved into the realm of science, and they need to start doing things scientifically. Once one is able to demonstrate that, and you have clients who are willing to go by your judgment and do what you recommend, then I think we will see a quantum shift in the perception of the profession.

So would you consider public relations in Nigeria to be more of an occupation or a profession?

It depends on how you look at it. Every thing at the end of the day boils down to bread and butter. If you have fun making money, it is a vocation. If you have fun pursuing it with the aggression of all you have read in books, it is a profession. I think a lot of that will pass from individual perception. But I think it is a profession; really.

And why so, Sir?

Because, as in other areas of human endeavor, you’ve got to be trained for it. It now helps if you have the temperament for it. One of the things that our old bosses used to quarrel about is that all of us had the brainpower but we didn’t exhibit the PR traits. But when it comes to issues and how to deal with them, we knew how to do that, but imagine how well we would’ve done if we got into the social part of it. The social part of it is also what determines the business growth. Because if you are not well networked the businesses don’t readily come like that.

Okay. So what positions do public relations practitioners or professionals typically hold within an organization? Is it usually an executive management position, or is it usually a technician position?
In recent times, depending on the size of the organization and the vision of the drivers of those businesses, PR would most likely remain a little bit in management but maybe a lower level of management. But in some organizations that really understand the value of PR, you’ll find that the people there occupy very senior positions. Like for instance, there used to be a time when in the whole of the banking industry, the highest PR practitioner was an assistant general manager, and that was in an old generation bank – Union Bank. I am not aware of any PR person that has become an executive director for instance, except if he started out in PR and then made some kind of lateral shift or move into mainstream banking or something like that. Other than that, they are still a little below executive management positions. But these days, they are seen, and they are heard. If you take about 10 organizations, chances are that out of those 10, the ones where you have well-trained, well-respected, well-positioned PR practitioners may not be more than 3. The next level of maybe another 4 or 5, you will find them in middle management. In a number of cases, they just move people from admin or human resources to go and oversee public relations, and then they get one or two junior people to assist them.

Okay, so what do you think is the reason for that?

It is an evolving understanding of what PR is. Before the quality of people that we had in practice at corporate levels were much lower. Now, the number is increasing. More peoples views are getting to be respected. If you are in bad standing with the public sphere, you can’t even do well financially, because by the time word of mouth begins to destroy the organization, what else are you working for? That is when they put a lot of pressure, and that is when recruitment sometimes gets stepped up for the public relations function. After solving the challenge, maybe they could go back to their old ways, but at least the understanding is growing. For some of them who do not want a PR person at that level, they maybe outsource the function. So you find that by the time there is better appreciation for PR then the thing will change somewhat, and you have more quality people doing the function. But it is still not all organizations that outsource. They think more in terms of profit.

So from what you’re saying I’m gathering that public relations practitioners are typically not involved in the major decision making of the organization?

I think it depends. It depends 1, on their placement within the organization; 2, even if you are placed at the lowest level and you make meaningful contributions to discourse, perceptions could easily shift. When discussions at management levels hold, chances are that nobody is really expecting the PR person to say anything. So when they begin to talk, they call on the account, the engineer, and then they look at the PR person like he has nothing to say. It once happened in my organization – that was before I came in. The person who held the position before I left also used to be my
boss at the quadrant. He said one day they were in a meeting and they were discussing and he said something, and someone said “Ah. Corporate communication is also talking!” so it’s a function of what you as an individual, as a professional, have brought to the table. If you are able to demonstrate it very well, people will learn to respect you. So it is not too much a function of where you are. Where you are helps. But if you don’t define your role within the set-up, and people don’t see what exactly you do, you are just like glass. They see through you. They know you’re there, but its nothing serious.

So I do understand from a lot of professionals that I have spoken with that most of the departments or units are not called public relations units.

Yeah. It depends. In public service for instance, they would usually call them public affairs. In some organizations they call them corporate communications. In some they call them PR. In some they just lump them under human capital whatever.

What do you think is responsible for this?

Again, even within the profession, I don’t think there is any industry wide agreed nomenclature, and I’m not talking about Nigeria alone; practically all over the world. It depends on the kind of activities that each organization does. For instance in the oil industry, most of the times they get called public affairs or government relations or community relations. Because by the nature of their own industry, that is what they are doing – community relations, government relations, public affairs. Whereas in banks, in insurance, in some of these places, they will call them corporate communications. It sounds a little cheap. But when you say public relations, what exactly is public relations? So that creates it’s own headache.

Okay. Alright. So you were just talking about how the duties differ based on the industry that the practitioners are in. so what kind of duties do public relations professionals in your organization perform? Is it mostly again just media stuff?

Media holds the larger percentage of the public relations function, because if you have to communicate, definitely, the media will be your primary vehicle. Then the other duties that they also perform include protocol functions, event management functions, and general advisory services. It depends on the way you look at it. In a typical corporate affairs/communications department, you also have sub departments. So you have those who are in charge of media, those who are in charge of events, those who are in charge of protocol, visa and passages and everything. So that’s why some people choose to call them corporate affairs – that is everything lumped together. You have somebody who has expertise in each field who is able
to manage those functions. But on a general scale here in this country, right now, it is skewed more in favor of media.

So are public relations practitioners subject to any higher authority within the organization or even externally?

Well even if you are the M.D you are subject to higher authority. If you are the chairman, if it is a public quoted organization, you are subject to the Securities and Exchange Commission. So definitely. But again, it is in the reporting system that you know what exactly or how powerful the function is. In a number of organizations, they report to somebody who reports to the CEO. I have been fortunate that I've had to report directly to the CEO. To that extent, it has advantages. That is because one has a boss who has a good understanding of how and what he wants to communicate. So to that extent, he feels like the message might get diluted. At some point, the department reported to the deputy managing director who was a lawyer, and you know there is and will always be some kind of conflict when you put a PR person and a lawyer together. You are saying to say it one way, and the lawyer is saying what the implication is. If you listen too much to the lawyer all of the time, you wont say anything because they will always tell you how you say things will affect your liability and things like that. So the option is you keep quiet, and if you choose to keep quiet, you find that your PR becomes reactive, and when it becomes reactive, there's a problem. I'll give you an example of the presidency. You'll find that there is hardly any good word for the presidency. The presidency is always reacting. They've not been able to see the initiative. They are not talking. Rather they are largely abusive. You tell them how a minister exceeded her power in buying a 225 million naira house, and then rather than seize the initiative before that thing became an issue --- At least you always know that when a reporter comes and starts to dig for information, you better start preparing your holding statement. But they don't do that. Instead what you find is the situation where things are published then they begin to react. If you take about two or three newspapers and study them, you will find that it is largely reactive PR from that point. So any organization that also takes that kind of stance by virtue of its reporting system – lawyer or PR person – its almost always going to be reactive. So who you report to makes a world of difference, and it is not in all organizations that the thing is well structured.

So are there any internal rules in the organization, or externally through the NIPR that the public relations practice is bound by in your organization?

Basically everybody abides by the NIPR code, which is that morally, professionally, you must do the right thing. So every other thing is just an embellishment of all of those codes. You will find that for PR to function well in any set-up, it helps if there is a communication policy. Any organization that functions without a policy that determines who the spokesperson is, is going to find
itself in trouble. In times of headache, this person is talking, that person is talking, this other person is talking, and almost always what they are going to be saying will be at variance. That could, God helping them, be positive. If they are not so lucky, another tower of babel. So when you begin to talk at cross-purposes, then you know that you are sinking faster than anything. So everybody will have to be guided by that policy. As in journalism too, truth is always a defense. So if you hold on to truth, of course you can always bend some. You bend it but you don’t break it. There will always be situations, but any situation can always be explained away.

Okay. Are there any organizational requirements for public relations practitioners? Are they required to have any kind of specific skills or certifications to be able to practice public relations in your organization?

That ordinarily will be the ideal. But unlike doctors, engineers and accountants, for PR there is no --- when organizations want to recruit PR people, they are not almost always too particular about the qualifications. They want people who are familiar with the media and all that, and they now put that membership with the NIPR will be an advantage. I don’t think that is the way it should have been stated. It should have been a prerequisite to whatever you are doing. Membership of the NIPR is compulsory, so if you don’t have it, it makes life a lot easier to weed out those who don’t have it. But when you say it will be an advantage, that’s saying if someone doesn’t have it, but he is presentable, he speaks well, he impresses, and one thinks he can do the job, then its good. So it’s not too well defined for one to be able to say without this, you cant run this function.

So I know we had talked about this before, and you said you can’t really say specific factors, maybe culturally, that affect public relations. But do you think the government in any way, or the government structure, or the government policies affect public relations in Nigeria?

Ordinarily, by setting out the enabling laws that govern the practice of PR, government has said this is the way this should be practiced. That is an ideal situation. You find that the laws are there, but the question of how well the law is applied remains. That makes it incumbent on the NIPR to say they are going to ensure that the law is obeyed. You find people who are not supposed to be practicing or who are practicing without ethics. For those who are registered and are violating ethics, simple – yank them off the register. If you look at the legal profession for instance, if you are taken before the disciplinary committee and you are found guilty to have violated professional ethics, very simple. They will draw your registration. You are disbarred. You can’t practice. Same thing for medicine – if the medical and the dental council find you in breach of laid down rules and regulations, you are pulled off the membership register. Of the tripod of communication in Nigeria – advertising, journalism, and PR – advertising is perhaps the
strongest. They also have a charter just like the NIPR has a charter. They have been able to make people feel like if they don’t obey the rules, they may get punished for it. If they don’t pay their annual subscription, their names will be yanked off the register. So people rush to do that for advertising. For NIPR, it is still not like that. You won’t even get communication from them a lot of the time. Meetings are called and people like me don’t attend. It doesn’t make the institute to be any stronger. And then for journalism, that one is mass market; for all comers. So government has done its bit in terms of articulating the basic requirement. It is now left to the practitioners to up the game; to make it a level higher; and then now try to sanitize them. But I tell you, currently, the industry is a lot saner that it used to be. But it can only get better.

Finally Sir, is there anything else you would like to share with me, or any other thoughts you have about public relations in Nigeria with regards to professionalism?

Well, I guess we’ve virtually covered all grounds. What just remains to be said is that if more attention is paid to 1 – the professionalism in terms of ensuring that only those who are qualified to practice are in practice, and if practitioners are able to sell meaningful solutions to clients and be ready to defend the solutions they are selling, then as business and as a profession, PR can only get better. I see a lot fly-by-night people in practice. They are not qualified to practice but they are there. A lot of people in PR are actually fixers, especially those that deal with the public sector, with government. So you call them and say how your election is coming and you need heavy PR. Heavy PR means I need you to help me move money to people – groups, and who ever I think. Being a fixer doesn’t make you a PR person. You must have the professional competence to be able to do it. Of course if you have the professional competence and then you have the personal qualifications of being a good fixer, you are richer. That’s just what it means. But ordinarily, things have got to be done as professionally as possible with every body respecting the laws. Then in terms of the education, if you check the schools that offer PR, what kinds of texts are we using? Books written by professor somebody in 1940, and all of that. I think it would have been nice for you to speak with a university professor of public relations, so that you will have an idea of what exactly they teach and what they are releasing to society. So something has got to be done about the syllabus of educational institutions that offer PR. Without that, you are just bringing in graduates; finish! So what you then find is that agencies begin to build some kind of schools. I have spoken with quite a number of freshers, and when you ask them what they know about certain topic, they say they weren’t taught. So what exactly where they taught? It’s a problem, and it is not restricted to PR; practically every profession. Lawyers complain, doctors complain. What that goes to show is that sometimes, it is not so much what you adopt, but what you are able to find out for yourself. For some people it is just what the professor taught today. A lot of our students can’t function outside of lecture notes, and then when
the exams come, they just regurgitate the thing. So there has also got to be some kind of synergy between the town and the (inaudible word). Professionals in practice need to move into the academia to be able to share experiences, and then the academia too need to let people know that they may know the practice, but a little bit of theoretical grounding. Some of the things are not really as simple as they appear to be. So if there is that regular interaction, I think it will only get better. Once you are able to do that, the orientation will change. But as far as PR is concerned there will still be that nagging headache of what exactly PR is. Insofar as corruption still gets to be a major problem in this country, PR = Ghana must go.

Well thank you so much Sir, I greatly appreciate your time!

You’re Welcome!

PARTICIPANT 11

Ma please how many years of public relations experience have you had?

About 18 years.

Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Yes, yes. I actually have an MBA in public relations and advertising from (inaudible word) Business School, and I have a postgraduate diploma in journalism. I got my first degree in the sciences, but I decided to go into communication because I realized that that was where my strength lay as a person. So I’ve done that and then I also belong to the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. For over 3 years, almost 4 years, I was the assistant public relations manager for MTN Nigeria, and then for about 6 years I worked with Globacom as the corporate affairs manager. Before going to MTN I worked at the Quadrant Company. It’s like the university of public relations in Nigeria. I’ve also done some (inaudible word) in broadcasting and the media and stuff like that.

How many years is your membership at the NIPR?

How many years now? Since 2007.

Okay. So about 6 years?

Yeah. About that.
And what level is your membership Ma?

We are due for an upgrade this year, but I am a full-fledged member.

Okay. Alright. Did you receive any formal training by the NIPR or your organization to be able to practice public relations effectively?

From my own organization, I remember when we were located in the GRA. We used to do some weekend courses. It’s not every employer that will be magnanimous enough to let you do things like that on the side, so I kind of deferred it.

So none by the NIPR?

No. No. I wouldn’t say so.

So Ma, please how would you define public relations?

Well there are quite a number of definitions for public relations, but from my own point of view, it has to do with a lot with planning, it has to do with implementation, it has to do with sustenance, it has to do with corporate image of an organization, and maintaining a good public image and reputation out there basically.

So would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession in Nigeria?

I think both, depending on how you want to look at it. It is a profession in the sense that you go to school to get the degree, to get the necessary qualification and then you come back to practice it. So it is both a profession for me, and an occupation. We basically just sent up this consultancy because I was feeling that it will be nice to just garner all the experiences I’ve gained over the years and apply it meaningfully to do something for myself as a person and then for the profession.

And when you say the “necessary degree,” what exactly are you referring to? Because I am aware that we don’t really have a set public relations degree in Nigeria.

A lot of people do it at the masters level, not at the first degree level. At the first level, everybody is basically just doing mass communication. Now when you get to the level of specialization, you can decide to maybe choose advertising – for instance when I was doing my MBA, I chose advertising and public relations. Some other people probably chose event and sponsorships to major on. And then some people went on with journalism. So it depends on where exactly you want to pitch your tent at the end of the day, and the sort of value it is going to add to your person and to your career.

So what kind of duties do public relations practitioners typically perform?
The duties are many; they are varied. In active public relations consultancy, no two days are exactly the same. We do a lot of writing. We write press releases, we write features, we write background information, we deal with a lot of creative works. We are trying to set up a video library, we are trying to set up a photo library. We do a lot of captioning, and then we do a lot of planning for events. You have to be some sort of good speaker; be a good writer. You have to be versed in communication because some days you could find yourself organizing a conference – it could be a conference, it could be a press conference, it could be a seminar – and often times it is anchored by the public relations practitioners. At some point you would be required to make an announcement for something. So we do quite a bit of that. You have to have a lot of negotiating skills. We are in a professional public relations consultancy. You have to have client management skills. You have to be able to manage your time appropriately and then be able to manage your clients. We do a lot of presentations. Sometimes it could be to a very small group like we are in this room, sometimes it could be to the whole organization or the management team. Of course we also have to have project management skills. You have to be able to deliver on time, and within budget. How many have I mentioned now? You have to be able to speak coherently and fluently, you have to be able to write – we do a lot of writing – and then liaison with other departments because you are not doing anything in isolation. I remember when I was in corporate public relations; when I was working for MTN or Globacom. You know you are working in conjunction with sales, you are working with the guys in marketing, you are working with the guys in product development, and at some point you could be required to be at the call center, not as a (inaudible word); you could just be there to observe what is going on. At the end of the day you do your report. I didn’t mention reports. We do a lot of reports. If you are an in-house public relations practitioner, you would be the one to relate with your consultants, you will be the one to relate with the journalists. We do a lot of media relations. One agreed journalist may just decide to spoil a campaign for you, so you have to have the capacity to manage a crowd and also be able to manage a single individual if need be. So we do loads of media relations, we do loads of writing, organizing photography, dealing with creative people. I don’t know how many I’ve mentioned now, but generally things along that line.

So some of the skills that you’ve mentioned -- are those some of the requirements for public relations practitioners in your organization?

Oh yes. Oh yes. The job specification will tell you exactly what is needed. You have to have to have a pleasant personality. You have to look presentable. Often times you are the face of the organization. In the event that you are not the face of the organization, the people that speak on behalf of the organization – you are going to have to put them through appropriately. What to say to the media, what to say in many instances, and then we are crisis managers. That is what we do in Nigeria. You know people could
just deliberately dig up some dirt on your organization, and then sometimes it could be an accident. There could be maybe an accident involving your fleet, or maybe someone dies at the call center, or maybe – I remember when I was working in Globacom. A mast fell somewhere in Edo state and almost killed somebody and destroyed the house. They were up in arms. It was one tiny local hut, but you know in Nigeria now, very opportunistic and everything. They wanted a mansion in place of that. They counted the inconvenience. They were going to be uprooted from what they had always known. So you have to be a very good crisis manager. You have to be able to manage even the CEO of the organization. You put him through, tell him what to do at every point in time. If he is going to address the press at a conference, tell him how to go about it and tell him things like that. So it’s a whole lot.

So you started talking about advising CEO’s ad making company decisions.

Yes. Yes.

Is public relations an integral part of the decision of making of organizations?

Oh absolutely! I am happy you asked that question. Initially it was not always like that. It was just some sort of peripheral function. You were just seen as the media relations person; somebody that will make them look good in the media; maybe you take the CEO’s photograph to the guardian and he sees it and he feels good. But now it is a management function. You need to sit there to be able to have a proper view of what is going on in the organization. It can’t afford to be a peripheral function. So now it has sort of received that approval. It has grown in depth; it has grown in acceptance, and even in sophistication. It is a management function. It has to be a management function for it to work out especially in this environment. You have to sit at that level to be able to make a meaningful impact.

So how do public relations practitioners in your organization serve the clients?

It depends on how we get into the picture. Sometimes we could receive a brief to pitch. You can have like 7 public relations consultancies going to pitch for an account, and of course you know the best person wins. So it depends on the entry route. At other times, you could just be invited to come and make a presentation to them. They could give you a brief about where they want to be in this New Year, this is how they positioned, this is how they want to be seen by the public. You come back, do your homework very well, do your research very well, put together a proposal, go make the presentation and then take it up from there. you take a holistic look at the organization – where they are coming from, what their competitors are doing, how their staff members are positioned. There is something that obtains in Nigeria. Everybody wants the Nollywood movie stars as their ambassadors. And then you realize that internal communication is zero. I have always
thought that your staff members are your best ambassadors, because they understand your business inside out. I would say that I have very fond memories of working in MTN. If MTN was going to launch a product maybe tomorrow, today every staff member knows about that product – especially in the early days, in the infant stage. You get home and maybe your parent is asking you what this product does for them. As a staff of that company you can't afford to draw a blank. You have to be able to say what it does even if you are not able to explain the product inside out. You have to know the basic functions, the sort of convenience and value it adds to the subscriber. So MTN used to do that very well. Every management decision is explained in the way you would understand and the way it applies to your own unit; the expectation of your own unit to key into that corporate role. But that wasn't my experience in Globacom. They could launch a product and even people in the company don't know about it. So someone calls in and they are not able to help them. That sort of thing. So it depends on how to get to the picture. At certain times you could maybe have a link to the organization, and you say you've looked at what they are doing, you've looked at what their competitors are doing, and you think they are taking a beating in the media. If they go this route, even if they are not able to match them, they will see their break lights and all of that. Maybe you can ask for an appointment and then you will get to present your proposal and get in there. So you basically advise them on what to do in terms of product, in terms of company profiling, talking about the executives. In some organization, the over flock one person and you begin to see the organization as maybe lacking in depth. And some organizations in Nigeria still have that colonial mentality frame. If we have a white CEO, we want to tell them we have arrived and all of that.

So are there any internal or external rules or regulations or codes of ethics that are binding on the practice of public relations in your organization?

Oh yes. Oh yes. That's why we have the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, and there is also the PRCAN – Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria. For instance, if you were a Serumun and co PR, and I am an (Censored name) PR, you don't come and canalize my account. It's unethical. Some advertisers in Nigeria do that. Some advertisers go the whole route – 360 communication. They have public relations consultancies among them. So when they are going to pitch for big clients, they tell them if they get the accounts, they will give PR free of charge. You understand? But the industry tries to discourage that, and where that comes to a fault is where you deliberately canalize someone else’s account – that is try to take the account away from the person, maybe by way of incentivizing the corporate organization.

Okay. So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or even globally?
Well I would say that the world is now a global village – more or less – because of the advances in technology. I remember when we started out initially at the quadrant company. Every 4 o’clock you knew it was time for media visits. We would take press releases, and I mean physically – I’m talking about year 2000 – we would take press releases physically and go to the media houses. The way we have the media clusters in Nigeria, if you look at the Apapa axis you have The Guardian, shortly after that you have The Champion. If you go further down, you have Vanguard, and then you have The Sun, and then you have Thisday – all on that axis. Then if we are going the other way—okay punch has relocated now. So you choose a particular axis to be able to maximize the time, and then you face that axis. But that doesn’t happen anymore. All you need to do is send an email and everybody gets it. We used to go with a floppy disk there; you know take a floppy disk and give to somebody so that everything is downloaded to save time. But nobody does that anymore. So in a way I would say that there is some sort of standardization in the sense that practices that are adopted in the U.S or even in the U.K, you get to read about them online and you can immediately adopt them if they suit your purpose; if they help you to deliver your corporate goals. We also run a blog. Well it was a blog but we want to make it a website – The Communicat. The Communicat basically is divided into two: we have the brand (inaudible word) that talks about advertising, public relations, eventing, branding, promotions, the whole works. Then you have the entertainment angle celebrating our Nollywood Stars, our fashion designers, people like that. So you have some sort of streamlining. Yesterday I read something called “A PR note for the New Year.” It was written by a lecturer at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the guy also maintains a site – Dynamic Branding. So I just stumbled on it because I was looking for something. What I’m trying to say is that now we have broadband. Everybody can access the Internet. I remember when we used to go to pay at NITEL to make calls. You slot in your coin, and if you wasted time, people will start shouting on the queue that you can’t be there forever; that type of thing. Now everybody has access to the telephone. You can call your house, maybe your plumber, you can call your driver, the mechanic; life is a lot easier compared to what it was 11, roughly 12 years ago, before the advent of telecommunications. So in a way I would say that there is some sort of standardization in the sense that we access information very quickly. I remember when I was at the quadrant company. We were an affiliate of (inaudible word) Corporate Communications based in South Africa. So if they got an account for Africa, they would give us the one for West Africa, they would handle the one for South Africa, and then they had a (inaudible word) with some guy in Egypt or Mauritania, I can’t remember, but somewhere up north, to coordinate for the northern African countries and that worked seamlessly well. It was essentially the same (inaudible word). You just sort of adapted it to the peculiarities of your environment. We used to cover the English
and even French speaking West Africa. So I would say that it compares favorably and we have loads of affiliations. A lot of those guys are coming in here looking for affiliations, looking to make in-roads into Africa. As you would’ve known, Africa is the next destination. Everywhere is settled. We have matured markets all over the world, so Africa is where a lot of global attention is being focused. So I think we are sort of at par. Yes.

So do you think that there are any factors in the Nigerian environment – maybe culturally or traditionally or politically, socially – that maybe affect public relations practice or professionalism?

I would say yes; quite a few of them for that matter. Earlier on I spoke about some big advertising firms wanting to (inaudible word) out of business. They could just have a team of 5 handling public relations. What they try to do is to keep the business in the group. So they go to the big advertisers and ask for an account in exchange for PR free of charge. So that is there. The second factor I would point out would be the fact that everybody in Nigeria thinks they can do PR. They don’t sort of attach a lot of professional sentiment to it. For instance, you could call a journalist, tell him you are running a campaign, give him your budget, tell him you want to cut costs, and tell him what you want him to do for you. So the journalist out there is not only doing the journalism work. He is also some one-man PR practitioner, and all he does basically is go and write press releases, or makes sure that you are on the cover of some fancy magazine, just the shallow toe-in-the-water kind of PR practice. They do not have the exposure and the experience to give you the total gamut. There is a lot of advising in public relations, and then for you to be able to do that it is born out of the experience, it is born out of your total understanding of the inside out of the workings of that business. You have to do some sort of competitive analysis to see what the market is like, maybe in Nigeria or somewhere else, see what the competitors are doing, and then you are able to advice your client appropriately. If all you are doing is just taking a press release from their PR guy to go and plant in the media, I can tell you that is not good enough. You are sort of short-circuiting the real PR practitioners. That sort of thing. And then thank goodness people are beginning to see the need for consultancies – the sort of business that we run. The practice before used to be that you just set up your in-house PR team. Now the problem with that is that sometimes they get overfamiliar, they get fatigued, by the challenges of the organization. They are not able to bring a fresh perspective, which is the sort of value that a consultant would add to your business. The consultant is seeing things from the point of view of a dispassionate person. He or she has some sort of holistic picture. He is looking at your company, he is looking at the industry, he is looking at your competitors. Now your staff members a lot of the time, when they write a press release, it turns out to be a corporate offering bragging about achievements and positions. By the time you try to confirm, you realize that some of the claims are not true. So companies
are beginning to see the value that a consultant, and the fresh energy that a consultant can inject into the business and they are beginning to patronize consultants without prejudice to their own PR practitioners. So the two work in collaboration. A lot of the telecomm companies do that. I know Etisalat recently signed on Media Craft. MTN works with two principal companies – they work with Xcelerate and they also work with Marketing Mix. Then I know Airtel still works with the Quadrant Company, and I think Blue Flower. So all the major companies in Nigeria patronize and sign on the services of the consultants.

So I have spoken with a couple of people who have expressed some concern over the fact that public relations is synonymously associated with the brown envelope or money exchanging hands and that kind of thing, and have called it a challenge to the profession. What do you think about that?

Okay. I think the way we do it, we’ve gone beyond that. We tend to tow the route of relationship management. All through my tenure in MTN I never had to give a brown envelope to anybody, but we did things that mattered to the journalists. For instance, if they were celebrating their wedding anniversary you could have somebody from the PR team go in there. That means you maintain a proper database of their birthdays. When they are having their birthdays you put a call across to them. Of course you know that during Christmas season you cannot divorce the profession from the environment. At Christmas, people like to be appreciated in tangible terms. So if you have hampers to give to them, that is a worldwide practice, it is not seen as an inducement. So if you did that, if you do your work very well, you won’t have to be giving brown envelopes at every opportunity. Sometimes, you may have to do that, and that has to do with the poor state of things in Nigeria. A lot of the times, they don’t get their salaries on time, and if you are calling somebody from Apapa, or maybe somebody from Magodo to come and attend a press conference in Victoria Island, the person is going to have to drive down or take a vehicle, and its only reasonable that you give the person some sort of honorarium. That’s what I choose to call it. I think brown envelope is a bit pedestrian and sort of outdated. There are other ways of building and sustaining that relationship.

So this is more of a courtesy kind of thing?

Courtesy kind of thing and overall relationship management. You don’t do a peace meal kind of thing and it becomes a cash and carry business where every time they come, there is a brown envelope waiting. No. There are sometime you will have emergencies - general emergencies – and there isn’t even time for you to get the appropriate approval to be able to get money out of the system but you need to be out there. So I think it’s more professional to go the route of relationship management. That is what I preach. That is what I practice.
Some people have actually disagreed with me when I said this, but from my research I have kind of come to see that is it not really growing as fast as it could have or as fast as it should be. So do you think there is anything that is exactly responsible for this lack of growth and development of the profession in Nigeria?

Yes, I think we’ve covered quite a bit about that in the course of this interview. We have spoken about the fact that every journalist out there also doubles as a public relations practitioner, and a lot of the times, he is not paying for an office. He doesn’t have a company to maintain. He has his regular salary anyway, so he could take just anything. He could take peanuts. So that tends to stifle growth of the industry. And then I have spoken about the fact that some companies would never – a company like Globacom – go to get a PR consultant. Even their advertising business, a lot of it is being done in-house. They don’t maintain a media company. They tend to roll-up their sleeves and do everything in-house, and I think that sort of retards the growth in this sector. I have also spoken about the fact that the big time advertisers – okay Insight has a proper public relations consultancy, which is the Quadrant Company, an autonomous company on its own. So & U have some sort of backyard PR arm. So they have these multiplicities here and there, so what that means is that they keep the business within the group. So it doesn’t get out there to other people and that sort of tends to affect the growth of the profession in Nigeria. But I can tell you that a lot of these challenges are being overcome. Like I’ve said to you, PR has a better appreciation now. A lot of people have now come to understand what it means – that it goes beyond the brown envelope. Like when people want to bribe they say do some PR. I take it very personal. When you get that crass about a proper profession, as much as I can I try to put you through that it is not this very crass naira and kobo business that you think it is. I think in a way that is being worked on and that is being overcome.

Okay. So do you think that the government or politics in any way affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

I wouldn’t say very directly because we have some public relations practitioners, some consultants, which are even working for the government. So I think in a way they are trying to smoothen things out so that everybody benefits at the end of the day. I remember when Obasanjo was vying for the presidency in 2007. He engaged the Quadrant Company. They managed his campaign. So even politicians have come to realize that they need this service to be able to convince people in a subtle and in a very professional manner about their mission and things like that. And then like I was telling you, I think the profession has grown in the sense that you now have some specialized consultancies. You have people that specialize in entertainment PR. For instance TBT; their strength is entertainment PR. You have people that specialize in corporate and financials. You have
people doing political PR for instance. You have people doing personality PR; they just work with big time personalities and celebrities. So I think it has grown. All the government needs to do in Nigeria is – I mean, you have been in Nigeria here and you are a Nigerian. You know what the problems are. If we could have electricity, Nigeria could run on auto pilots. Nigerians are very hardworking. They persevere a lot. You come into the office from morning till night and you are on generator. It takes away from your bottom line at the end of the day. A lot of it. A chunk of it. A very significant chunk of it for that matter. So basically providing the enabling environment and we will be very happy.

So finally Ma, is there anything else you would like to tell me, or to add, concerning public relations and professionalism in Nigeria?

I’m going to summarize now. I think in a way it has grown beyond what it used to be. There were times that public relations practitioners, all they had to do was organize the AGM one or twice a year, and then maybe put in some fancy pictures in the media. But over time it has grown in terms of depth, in terms of appreciation, in terms of impact, and in terms of the value that they add to the business. It has also grown in terms of sophistication. I was telling you about specialization – that if you went to some people they will tell you that’s not what they do. I have a friend who doesn’t do political PR. He said he doesn’t have the temperament to deal with Nigerian politicians. So he has defined his terrain and he knows what he wants. There are some people that have their strengths in entertainment. There are some people that would only work with the banking sectors. They love working with numbers and companies in that category. So I will say yes, as a profession it has grown. It has gained a wider acceptance. I remember some time ago when the government appointed – recently really – a medical doctor to be the special assistant to the president of media and public affairs, and there was outcry among practitioners that this can’t be. A medical doctor for crying out loud? There are people in the profession that have paid their dues and that know what they are doing. There was a time a pharmacist – Dora Akunyili – was appointed as the minister for information and there was an outcry that this can’t be. The guy that is occupying that portfolio who used to be her assistant at that time is a journalist. He has a background in journalism and public relations. So I think even at the highest decision making body of the country, there is that level of awareness. There is another challenge. That you qualify as a journalist does not mean you qualify as a PR practitioner. It’s a mistake that people in government make all the time. The moment they see that you are a head journalist or a popular journalist, they ask you to come and manage their media and publicity, and often times they fumble. They did that with Segun Adeniyi. I’m going to get very personal now. They did it with Segun Adeniyi, they did it with Dr. Rueben Abati, but Rueben Abati is a more rounded person. I think he has more experience in the sense that he was also a lecturer at some point and was the chairman of the editorial
board of The Guardian, which is (inaudible word) of Nigerian journalism. So I think he is doing very well in that regard. I can tell you that even though they make a mistake, the awareness has been created that this is a profession, and if you are going to take somebody to manage that function, you have to draw from the pool of practitioners. You know so there is that awareness. Even the people that hire the journalists so to speak are just trying to cut down on cost because they wouldn’t want to hire a proper practitioner who is running a proper business, who is also looking to make some profit at the end of the day.

Well thank you so much Ma. I’m so grateful!

Thank you so much, Serumun. Thank you. I am happy that I was able to make some time.

PARTICIPANT 12

Ma, so can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you have had?

Specifically public relations?

Yes.

Okay. I think 9 years. 9 years.

Okay. Do you have any kind of qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Yeah. My first degree is in mass communication, which qualifies me to be a PR practitioner in the first instance. After that, I am also a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, a member of the IABC, that is the International Association of Business Communicators. Last year, I also did an MA program in communication and PR.

Okay. SO how many years is your membership in the NIPR? Is it all 9 years of your practice?

No. I think it’s about 7 years.

And to what level of membership do you belong?

Associate membership.

Okay. So in what areas have you worked with your public relations practice?
I think I started public relations practice in a consultancy firm. I worked with the Quadrant. I was with the Quadrant for 4 years providing public relations services to different clients. After that I also worked with corporate and financial communications which is another PR agency providing PR services to different clients. Then after that I joined this company, and I’ve been here for over 5 years now. Everything I do here is communications. It’s PR.

Alright. Did you receive any formal training by your organization or the NIPR to be able to practice public relations effectively?

I think with NIPR, no. It’s just professional membership; although I think I’ve attended or two of their training programs. But it’s not for certification. It’s just about updating myself professionally. Then with my former company, yes. And then with this organization, no. No formal training. For me, the basic formal training that I had, like I said I read mass communication. That is where the foundation of the training was done for public relations.

So Ma, would you please tell me how you would define public relations?

How I would define public relations. I think public relations is for me, about stakeholder management. It’s about making sure that there is a connection between an organization or maybe an individual and his or her stakeholders. It’s making sure that there is a positive perception between an organization and its various publics. And those publics they can be internal or external publics.

Okay. Would you consider public relations in Nigeria to be an occupation or a profession?

I think it’s both. I would say it’s both, to a large extent public relations in Nigeria is quite professional because we have people that are really outstanding professionals out there. In terms of academic background, they have public relations qualifications. Also, in terms of affiliations and they work they have done, there are some of them that right from school up till now – somebody like me for instance – has been through one form of training or the other for public relations. We can say that there are a lot of professional PR practitioners in Nigeria. But then on the other side, there are also some people that for them, it’s just an occupation. Because maybe they’ve gone to school, and you know the environment in Nigeria in terms of employment. Maybe they have read chemistry, or they have read something else and they are not able to gets jobs. Public relations is something that is not really technical. It’s quite soft. So it becomes easy for them to say they want to do one form of public relations or the other. Because I work a lot with the media, you see a lot of journalists for instance, who have maybe lost their jobs, and before you know it, they are doing PR. For them, PR is about media relations. It’s about approaching
maybe one politician to tell him you can get all his stories in the paper, manage a particular reputational issue. For those kind of people, it’s just an occupation. It’s just something to bring food to the table. If you look at the public affairs with government, the people that we have as special advisors to the public officials on PR issues, you see that for some of them, they are not professional people. So constantly, we continue to have different kinds of crisis, and the way they react to it shows very visibly that they are not PR people. Maybe they are journalists that have been known and think that it is just about media relations. For me it’s dual.

What positions do PR practitioners typically hold within organizations in Nigeria? Is it more of an executive management position or more of a technician position?

I think we have moved from the past. Before now, public relations wasn’t seen by many organizations as a strategic function. So they saw it as needing to have a public relations officer irrespective of the qualification, irrespective of the experience. They just get someone to manage that position and the person remains there. The discussions about the company in terms of the value that public relations is supposed to add to the company is not being felt. But I think to a large extent, public relations in Nigeria has moved. Many organizations, especially the multinational organizations, the international organizations, understand the importance of public relations. They are using it as a strategic tool for achieving their objectives, and you see a couple of PR practitioners being members of the executive committees of companies. So I think there is a shift.

So does this shift also include PR practitioners also being part of the major decision making of companies?

Yes, yes; to a large extent. But then we still have this challenge. It depends on the organization. There are some organizations that appreciate the importance of communication. They appreciate the importance of PR, and that is why I mention multinational organizations. You will find out that from the group they have their policies in terms of how public relations should be run. So irrespective of the country where they are operating, they have to fall in line. So you find that in those organizations, PR practitioners are part of the decision makers. They don’t even make decisions without asking for the implication of their decisions from communication.

Alright. So what kind of duties, typically, do public relations practitioners in Nigeria, or maybe your specific organization perform?

I think basically, PR practitioners in Nigeria manage stakeholders in their respective organizations, they manage reputational issues, they manage image issues, making sure that the organizations that they work for have the right
image out there, they manage crisis, and when you talk about stakeholders you further narrow down to the internal and external stakeholders. So in any typical organization, you find internal communication as a department, and what does that department do? Making sure that there is a flow of communication at the various levels of the organization, between the employees to the senior management, and it’s like vice versa; making sure that there is a feedback mechanism. For PR practitioners that are internal communicators, they also scan the environment for the organization, making the organization understand the things that are happening to employees; even the grape vine sources for instance, and that helps the organization to manage what could potentially become a crisis with their employees. As part of the value that public relations has to corporate organizations when it comes to internal communications, the practitioners help the employees to understand the goals and objectives of the organization. This is a new year for instance. The companies set the ambitions for the year, set the goals and targets for the year, and the employees need to know about it. So they make sure that that is communicated from up to down, and that everybody tries to understand and then key into that vision. And then I think externally as well, part of public relations practitioners is responsible for government relations, making sure that the organization has the right influence and the right image with the government as a stakeholder. If you are talking about government as a stakeholder that also leads to the area of sustainability for instance, and CSR. So those are areas that public relations is also practicing in Nigeria. CSR is a good way of giving back to the society and if you tie it to government, government recognizes and respects organizations that are adding value to their society. And also in the area of investor relations – that’s part of what we also do here as public relations and communications experts; making sure that we have the right communication going to our shareholders because they make their decisions based on the information that they have about the company. So making sure that they have the right information about the company at any point in time, and making sure that there is a platform of connecting with the shareholders. For instance, in our own organization we have what we call the investors forum annually, where we bring all our investors together and we facilitate a platform for discussion. They are able to ask questions about the health of the organization. If there have been rumors they have been hearing, we give them the right facts and the figures. The AGM is about packaging the company in such a way that we have the right image; a positive image and a positive reputation and if you do that well, and manage the stakeholders well, the fortune of the company will continue to be on the rise. If you don’t manage the shareholders well for instance, if you have reputational issues, that can affect the company. We are a publicly quoted company for instance, and everything about the information of the organization affects your rating out there. So those are areas where practitioners are adding values to their organizations. For
instance, we are also in the extracting industry, so we deal with the communities; we do a lot of community relations, making sure that the company is responsive to the needs of the community. If our production processes for instance are affecting the people within the community, we make sure that there is a feedback platform; the people know who to approach if there is a position for instance, and if we have problems within the communities we know the leaders in the communities. So it is about managing relationships with the key stakeholders of the organization. Customers are also there for instance; customer relations. Part of what we do in terms of customer relations is looking at the quality of our product for instance. We communicate the quality of the product, and make sure that customers continue to patronize the product. If there are problems, if there are complaints, they are part of the things that communication manages. So, maybe just to summarize.

Ok. Alright. So is public relations in this organization a whole department, or is it more of an individual?

It’s a whole department, and we call our department the communications department.

I have figured that in most organizations, departments are usually not called public relations. They are usually called public affairs, or public communication, or corporate affairs; what do you think is the reason for that?

Hmm. I think that’s a big question, and I think at one point in time I also had to ask someone at the group. I think the main reason for that is because the public relations profession has not taken itself to the standard at which it should be. I think so. Because if you take the accounting profession for instance, if you are an accountant, everybody knows you are an accountant. But here, sometimes because of the issues that have been associated with public relations, people are even shy to be associated with the profession. You have doctors and they are proud to say they are doctors. You won’t find a doctor and find him using another name. but here, like you said, they have different terminologies for that department. I also think it’s because the word public relations has been bastardized, so to say. It has a negative connotation sometimes, and corporate organizations don’t want to be associated with it. If you hear the word PR, it connotes giving gifts, giving bribes. I remember that when I joined this organization, they wanted to give gifts to somebody and they were writing the documentation as “PR to somebody” and I said no. it’s not PR. Write whatever you are giving to the person. It’s not PR. PR means public relations. It’s a profession. And that is the perception out there; that when you talk about PR, it’s about somebody trying to stop a bad press release, it’s about giving something to somebody, so some organizations want to say no, it’s about communication – communication to both internal and external stakeholders. But then if we look at the definition of public relations in the first instance, all the things that they are doing in the
communications department, or corporate communications, or corporate affairs, is about relating with the public – that’s what public relations is all about. It’s about relating with the public; making sure that you have a strategy for engaging with your different publics; identifying those publics and doing great programs to make sure that they get to appreciate your company and they see what your company stands for. It’s about making those stakeholders to know the values of your company. But that can only be done very well if it is a public relations practitioner – a professional – that is handling that function. If the person is not a professional, if the person is just there as an occupation, then the person will further bastardize that function. Because at every point in time, he sees dealing with a particular stakeholder more about doing unhealthy things to win that stakeholder to the organization. So I think maybe those are some of the reasons why people would rather use different terminologies. But I think there are still some organizations that say that their department is a public relations department. But they are few. The national companies, you are not likely to see them saying PR.

So what’s the reason that PR is associated with this negative image and bribe and exchange of gifts and things like that? Is there a foundational issue with the lack of understanding about what public relations is, or is education, or training? What do you think is responsible for this?

I knew that when I did a study – my own thesis – I found out that even if you look at the foundation of public relations, even outside Nigeria, there have been some very prominent PR practitioners in the past that took PR more as an occupation, such that they were just into the business of making their organizations look good. I think some of them were even attached to politicians. You know, in the U.S they take public relations as something that is very serious. You have public officials that are greatly supported by PR practitioners. So I think that from the foundation, that association has been there. Now if you look at Nigeria specifically where the word PR has also been bastardized, within the media for instance, you hear them saying “give us our PR.” If the communications person in that organization is not a professional, he or she will not challenge the usage of that word, and then it becomes something that becomes like a norm and on and on it goes like that. I also think that the professional bodies are not doing enough to sanitize the profession. I continue to make reference to ICAN because it is a very strong body in the country. You know for accountants, the fear of ICAN is the beginning of wisdom. Apart from studying accounting, you have to take the professional exam for you to be recognized. We don’t have that in PR. You need to get certification. But in public relations, certification is not a big issue. People that even studied English; you find a lot of graduates of English doing public relations. Why? Because certification is not a big deal. So these are some of the challenges we have in the profession.
Speaking of certifications, and being properly equipped for the job as a professional practitioner, what are your organizations requirements for public relations practitioners? Do they have to have certain degrees, or do they have to be certified by the NIPR to practice? And what are some skills required as well to be able to practice in your organization?

In my own organization, in terms of minimum qualification that is required, you will be expected to have a qualification in mass communications for instance. I think mass communication basically, and then sometimes they say a related field. But if it is a related field, if it is not really communication, then membership of NIPR for instance, will be something that is required.

So it is not necessarily required to be a member of the NIPR.

Yeah. It’s not. But then it depends on the level of the job. If it is a job that requires experience, if the person doesn’t have a first degree in mass communications for instance, but he or she has worked as a PR practitioner in a reputable organization, it is assumed that the person has got a lot of skills in PR, has developed his or herself along the way, then that can work. But if it is an entry level, then it has to be a degree in the communication area.

Oh Alright. Are public relations practitioners in your organization subject to higher authority within the organization or externally?

In my organization, the preference is that the communications person reports to the MD.

Ok. I have spoken with some people who have said that you can only rise so far being a public relations practitioner or professional. What are your thoughts about that, or your experience with that?

I think that is very true. I have a couple of people that have experienced that. Public relations, despite the fact that it is seen as a strategic function, is not seen as a core function like marketing. Marketing is important to an organization. It is assumed to be very very important to an organization because you need to sell all the goods that are produced. So that’s regarded as a core function. Production is a core function. Operations is a core function. Even resources is a core function. So all those functions that are considered to be core, such that if anything happens to those functions, it’s like life has stopped for the company. For those functions, they appear to be highly rated compared to the public relations function. We are more of providing services, so if anything happens, depending on the severity, it doesn’t really stop the operations of the organization. So because PR is more on the service side in many organizations, it’s like there is a ceiling for the public relations professionals. You don’t get them to become the MD of an organization for instance, compared to finance where you have the finance director being able to become the MD. In
some organizations, you have the HR directors being able to become the MD of their organizations. One other thing that I have seen as limiting is that there is an increasing need for public relations practitioners to also have an understanding of every aspect of the business. We are communications people and some public relations people don’t understand figures, they don’t understand P&L, they don’t understand operations. When it comes to making critical decisions, all those things are important. For you to be sitting on the management table, you need a robust understanding of what makes up business. Again, as a communications person, you are supposed to be supporting all the other functions. You are supposed to be supporting production, you are supposed to be supporting marketing, to be supporting finance and investor relations, to be supporting legal. So if you don’t have an understanding of every aspect of the business, you will end up being relegated. So I think for me it is the combination of those two factors.

Ok. So is there a training process for public relations professionals in your organization?

As an organization, training is important, irrespective of your function. People development is one of the key values of my organization. Irrespective of your functions, you are expected to be trained, you are expected to be exposed. So training is key, and you get to do different types of training. If it is training that is functional and is important, yes you do it. If it is about leadership skills that you need to get, if it is about management skills that you need to get, different avenues are available for training.

And are these usually internal, or external?

It is both. It is both.

Okay. So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries and even globally?

I think we have very good brains here that can compete favorably with their counterparts in the western countries, and it’s not only about public relations. Generally, Nigerians are brilliant people. The professionals that are really good professionals across various functions can compete favorably with their counterparts outside the country, and I think that also can be said for public relations. We have very bright brains, very good professional PR practitioners in Nigeria, and maybe in an area where the western world will have a head over us is in technology; maybe in access to more funds, less challenges with development. For a PR practitioner for instance, that is looking into the issues of CSR, his or her international counterpart has less pressure compared to the Nigerian practitioner. While the Nigerian practitioner is developing CSR programs to build roads, to provide water – all the basic amenities that should be there in the first instance, his counterpart outside the country sees hardly any pressure.
CSR is seen as something that is voluntary, and then the organizations give. But the working environment there – and not only the environment but the availability of infrastructure and other things – makes things easier for them. But then, pick a typical good Nigerian PR practitioner to go to the US to work, and the person is going to perform excellently because we work under a lot of pressure here.

Okay. So would you agree that there is maybe a lack of significant growth and development in the public relations field in Nigeria?

Yeah. I think I would agree.

And do you think that there are any factors just in the Nigerian environment or the society that kind of affect this or are kind of responsible for this?

I think the professional bodies are also not helping matters, because they are not putting standards in place. And even when we have standards, the standards are not being implemented. So that’s an area where a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that standards are in place, and not only in place, but that those standards are implemented to make sure that there is a growing rate of certification for professionals within the industry. That is something that is important that will raise the bar. Then to also work with corporate organizations to make sure that they are developing the talents that are coming up in the industry. So I think those are key issues that need to be addressed. So I’m sure once those issues are addressed, there will be an up scaling of the profession.

So do you think that the government or politics in any way affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

I don’t really think so. I think it is more about the public relations practitioners even helping government to achieve the right image; to achieve the right national image for the country. I don’t think the government is stopping us from developing our profession.

Okay. And finally Ma, is there anything else you would like to tell me, or anything else you would like to add concerning public relations in Nigeria and professionalism?

I think I am just very much concerned about this issue of making sure that public relations is actually seen to be a professional occupation. The professionalization of public relations is something that is important. If you don’t have the right standards there, and if the standards are not being adhered to it means that every Tom, Dick and Harry can say that they are a PR practitioner and can go into any organization. It means that in the long run if you are not careful, the younger ones coming up in the profession won’t even have a job to do because there will be so many people out there who have finished school, read English and want to be
practitioners. So that issue. And the issue of certification is also one that is very important.

Okay. Thank you so much for your time ma. I greatly appreciate it.

Thank you too.

PARTICIPANT 13

How many years of public relations experience have you had?

How many years now? I started my PR practice in 1993 from journalism. I started in a public relations consulting firm. I was the media manager.

So do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

Well my national diploma is in mass communication, and my higher diploma is in mass communication before I went to do an MBA majoring in Marketing.

Okay. Are you a member of the NIPR Sir?

Yes, for a long time.

How many years Sir?

I don’t remember. These days I don’t consider them a vibrant industry association.

Why Sir?

I don’t see them giving practitioners the relevant training. When you look at what is happening on this side of the world compared to the way they manage PR functions outside, I don’t consider them a vibrant association. This view came when I was a communications manager at *** for what we call ATS. From my job I was having training courses in London, so when I come back here, who are those people to teach me? Do you understand? To answer your question, that was around 1997.

So do you think the NIPR has grown more effective over time, or less effective over time?

In terms of what?

Training processes, certification, and things like that.
Well, not too long ago I read that they are doing some certification from the bottom; getting fresh graduates enrolled. Also, not too long ago, that should be about 5/6/7 years ago, University of Nsukka started a program for master’s in public relations.

Okay. So in what other areas have you worked?

Well from agency, three years after I moved to managing PR functions for clients in another company, but it wasn’t strong because we were focused more on core marketing. That was just after my MBA, so I concentrated more on core marketing. Thereafter, I left and moved over to another agency. From there I joined telecommunications.

Okay. So you said prior to now you travelled for training even outside the country and these were all sponsored by your organization, yes?

Yes.

Currently are you exposed to any organizational training?

No. But I won’t regret movement. At a time in your life you ask yourself what exactly you want. The opportunity came and I just had to move. If you sample the opinion of the average Nigerian worker, the question is what they take home, and that is as a result of the function of society today. In this organization, to answer your question, there’s nothing like that. Even when I came here, I told my staff that I do training programs. For me, I have some good training. It is residual now so that even if I cannot pass it on I can organize some for them. But the system does not grant that.

So Sir, please, how would you define public relations?

How I define it? You know, well, I don’t want to go into textbooks, but I think it is basically a function of where you project the image of your organization; projecting the image of your organization and ensuring that the right thing is said at the right time, and also ensuring that the truth about your organization is said instead of hiding it. Also, ensuring that you carry along your various stakeholders in anything that happens in your organization. For example, if there is a fire incident in one of your base stations, you don’t need to cover it up. You need to tell your stakeholder what you’ve experienced. Reason? So that they can sympathize with you, and know that this network is down because there is a problem somewhere; there is a challenge which you, as the PR practitioner has proven you are managing. So it is against what a lot of people do today and say they practice PR.

And what do you mean by that Sir? What is it that a lot of people do?
Yeah for example, there is a fire incident in one of your base stations, and some journalists picked it up somewhere and you say please don’t write about it, don’t do this and don’t do that. Why? Why should I tell the journalist not to write about it? No. I should give you the accurate information. For you as the PR practitioner, give him the accurate information about the fire incident and give him the locations and the steps that the organization is taking to fix everything so you can return the value that you give to stakeholders. That’s it.

I do understand from my past couple of interviews that public relations is kind of synonymously associated with bribery, or the brown envelope, or money exchanging hands and gifts to appease people, and people have called it a challenge to the profession. What do you think about that? It is something you have seen commonly in the profession, or in your experience?

You said two things. One is against the ideal setting, and the ideal setting is what I’ve explained to you. Things happen, explain, and also as the PR person, maintain good relationships with stakeholders, particularly your immediate stakeholder which is the media. On one hand, I know these issues you have mentioned happen. But from where I came from, an organized company, that is where I have had a good number of years of practice. I tell them I’m not going to use money for anything. Me, as a Christian, I am not going to do it. If I send a story to you as an editor, all I know is that I have been able to maintain a good relationship with you, and I am going to do my story, so that when you see it you will acknowledge that it is a good piece. I don’t need to bother you before you go ahead and publish. That does not remove the fact that if I have something I shouldn’t occasionally say thank you. But not in a direct way of bribery.

Okay. So what kind of duties do public relations practitioners in Nigeria or in your organization perform?

If you go by my definition earlier, primarily, you ensure that the communication that you are sending out is such that will guarantee good public perception of your company, your product, your services. In doing that, there are (inaudible word) that could come as a form of product launch, openings, whatever. Everything that you do, everything that happens in the company should be able to be put in such perspective that it would send out a good message about the company; give the company a better image outside there. So that means that the major thing you do is making sure that you come out with a sound communications strategy to guide the company. This communication strategy, you are looking at different media vehicles. You are going to be doing press releases, you are going to be doing features, you are going to be doing interviews, your are going to be organizing visits, through your company to the various stakeholders.
So are there any organizational requirements or certifications of public relations practitioners looking to join your company?

That is where we have a challenge. Some people just come into practice – people that are not accommodated in the political, economic or banking industry, and find themselves in PR because there is no rule guiding it. There is not a strong rule guiding it by the industry organizations. Like the lawyers, if they don’t go to law school, they are not going to practice. The doctors, if they do not pass through medical school, they are not going to practice. Pharmacists, the same thing. So there is absolutely no defined streamlined rule, either from the organizational point of view, or …

The NIPR?

No. No. NIPR will always say you must me a member before you practice. But if I’m going to hire you, NIPR qualification or membership is inconsequential to the value I see that I am going from you working for me. You don’t need to be in the NIPR. So there is no properly defined way. In other words, you could be a graduate of political science, even Christian religious knowledge or Islamic religious knowledge, and you find yourself writing good stories, having relationships with editors, or relationships with program or news directors, and can get things published. So it is open to all comers. You can be an engineer and you are practicing PR in Nigeria.

So are there any internal or external rules or regulations that guide the practice of public relations in your organization?

No. NIPR could mention that you must be a member before you practice, but who is that organization that is going to listen? You know, maybe because it is not a science and that’s why it’s so open. Some medical doctors are doing PR today. There is a man currently working for the presidency, he has his hospital. He was called back by the presidency to assist in handling public relations issues. I think I can swear on my life that he is not a member of the NIPR. Can NIPR go and sanction him? No.

So it has not been very effective?

There is no policy that is effective in that regard. Anybody can come in and practice PR and earn his living and retire.

So within your organization, is public relations considered an executive management position or is it more of a lower technician position?

Here, no.

It is not considered a management position?
No. What they want you to go and do is mainly media related. But what I consider being a management function is when we are drawing strategy for the business or planning activities, you carry the PR person along. In the process of planning – maybe you are designing a new product for the public or for your consumers, - if you don’t carry PR along, at the end, by the time you are bringing PR into it and you have already concluded and finished and now want to launch this, the man sits down to study the product or service and begins to ask himself questions. If Serumun buys this product, this is her demographic and all, and you are saying that she has the characteristics of the market segment, so you want to push it to her. If she buys the product and it is not doing for her what you are saying, there is going to be a problem. The PR function at that management level will look at how you are designing the product, what the features are, what the functions are, what the values are. The PR man will put himself as the consumer and begin to look at your presentation, your products, and all you claim. They should be able to come in at the management level and say what should be done. In most cases the PR people stay in the back while the marketing people design the product. It is an issue we still battle today. I’m sure if you talk to 10 PR practitioners in their organizations, 8 will tell you they are not into management functions.

So public relations is not really part of the major decision making of the organizations?

Yes. Even in government in Nigeria, it is not.

Do you consider that to be a problem?

Yes. It is a challenge. That is what I’ve told you. It is a challenge. I know in Nigerian breweries they have a PR adviser. I don’t know the functions of that man, but I want to believe that when marketing is designing a product, when marketing is planning a luncheon, they carry him along as adviser. I’m looking at it literally now. That’s why I told you – 80%, zero. Maybe 20% will be up there. Most general managers will finish designing and then call the PR man to make the presentation. We had this fight in my previous organization and there we called it corporate communications. That is even more enriching than when you say PR.

Why is that Sir? Because I have actually noticed that a lot of companies call it public affairs or public communication and a lot of things apart from public relations. So what is the reason for that?

Okay let me give you from the practical point of view. If you want to do a launch for example, you get the media, they come in, you talk to them, you do the launch, you probably write the story, send to them, organize photographs, go in the system where they give brown envelope (because you are probably doing that), the next morning you come in and cut pages out of the paper and see the companies appearance and everybody is happy.
That is the beginning and the ending of PR to some organizations like where I am today. But if you talk of public affairs or public communications, it goes beyond that. It includes looking at your stakeholder issues, and strengthening your functions as a business. You look at government relations and the rules and values in the business because if you don’t liaise well with the government it could be a problem. When they are taking decisions, it could affect your business. But if you have liaison, when they are taking decisions, somebody will mention to you, “Hey Serumun, next meeting, they might say things that might affect your business.” And what do you do? You begin to reach out immediately. It doesn’t matter whether you call it lobbying. So that is public relations at the highest point. So that is corporate affairs. It is encompassing. It involves (inaudible word), it involves media relations, it has a wheel – events, media relations, communication itself. So that is more encompassing than narrowed down PR. Here for me, my little knowledge in the industry is so tiny. Many people in top management think PR is just “go and get us this. Go and do this.” Only 20% will see your job beyond that. Like I said earlier, the president released the budget for the year. You take the budget and you analyze it and see where the industry stands. You ask yourself where your company stands in relation to where the entire industry stands. You have strategy. In some places, they don’t even have strategy. They won’t allow you to draw, and when you draw your own strategy, it might not work.

So, what is the reason that a lot of people see PR as a very narrow field based on the more minor things? Is it a lack of understanding about what public relations really is? Or is it a lack of appreciation for the benefits of public relations?

I think it’s a combination of both. The people that are practicing it, some of them don’t understand what they are doing, probably because of lack of knowledge; also, the mindset of business owners, or business drivers. Again, the general feeling that PR managers are just going to lie about companies. It’s like the police PRO talking today and they say armed robbers killed some people. The next thing is that police shot and killed 2 or 3 or 4 of them. If they say 5 of them, know that they are saying 1. If they say 2, know that they killed no one. So that is the perception. The day that they are telling us the truth we won’t know. Some people don’t understand what the function is all about just because they don’t have the basic training. Some people just want to do PR to make money. Some people just know people and go to get jobs because they are friends with higher authority. So when they get in, they are not thinking about what their strategy is, or what their plans are. That is the issue.

And I do understand that a lot of universities don’t have an undergraduate or graduate program for public relations study. So what is generally considered as a good foundation for public relations practice in Nigeria?
From the academic point of view, you must study mass communication. You also have to study marketing. In marketing there is also this thin line. But if you don’t study any of these then you find yourself in the media; maybe a political science graduate, mathematics graduate, and you are writing in one media organization, it is also considered here as a prerequisite for you to function as a PR person. Why? People think that media relations is PR. PR starts and ends with media relations. That is the best question you’ve asked me so far. That is the way we look at PR here. So lack of academic foundation on the subject is one of the areas that should be addressed. Lack of basic academic knowledge will weaken understanding of what the profession is. We are talking of master’s in public relations in Nsukka. Why start from masters? Why not start from a first degree? I know in mass comm. We have courses I advertising, marketing, philosophy, we have psychology, and you know, those are tiny bits. So why don’t we expand the curriculum on PR? I think that will also help, so that in the future, if you enter a place you know what you are going to do. Before the people begin to tell you things, then they also know what also obtains.

So speaking of this, how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or even globally?

For me, they do more of the ideal things. Earlier I told you that here we are managing perception in different ways. So I wouldn’t want my stakeholders to know that I have a challenge and that is what is affecting my service or my product. But over there, they will tell you everything. They will even own up when it is their own fault. In 2008 in my other company, they changed the managers’ cars, and there were a lot of issues with that Toyota brand. In Japan and America, they started withdrawing those vehicles, and they gave us numbers of those suspected. My colleague’s number was there. That is PR. PR is not just going to be you as a manager or director. It is going to be a function of top management. It takes some guts to lead the organization in the way they should go to win the confidence of stakeholders. Over there, they tell you the truth, and tell you where they are going and when you will see a change. Here this is almost non-existent and that is the difference.

So do you think that the government or politics in any affects the practice of public relations in Nigeria?

No, no I don’t think so. Not by policy, not by anything.

So finally Sir, is there anything else you would like to tell me or add about public relations professionalism in Nigeria?

Well, I don’t know if there’s anything I have not said. Something which I actually mentioned earlier is how can we improve the practice? That means a lot of orientation at the highest level. It is something that NIPR should also be
requiring. They should say a specific way that we are supposed to do things. They should streamline it. The way company A practices shouldn’t be too different from company B, except you are not in the same industry. It shouldn’t be too different from company C. yeah, you may have different stakeholders, but the PR function is the PR function everywhere, so why don’t we standardize it? The NIPR should add more value to the industry association, and train people.

Thank you so much, Sir. I greatly appreciate your time.

I hope I have been helpful.

Yes, you have!

PARTICIPANT 14

Sir can you please tell me how many years of public relations experience you have had?

So many years. Why I say that is I had some experience before even graduating from school. My first contact with PR was in 1991 and I have been so much in love with PR since then. It was a time I was still studying. I was in school but I also had the opportunity to practice, so I was in school and practicing until my graduation in 1996. After my graduation, I still did some things that had to do with PR. Finally in 2000, I went into full PR practice and management – corporate public relations.

So do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice, Sir?

Yes I do.

Which Sir?

I am a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations. At least for now I am a registered number for the first four years as an associate, then the next 10 years as a full member. Even this year I should be due for a fellow of the institute.

So you’re 14 years in the NIPR?

14 years, yes.

So in what areas of public relations have you worked?

Only corporate public relations. That’s what I do.
Do you have an undergraduate or graduate degree in public relations?

I have a masters in communication studies. Well I read mass communication. I had my national diploma in mass communication. I had my HND in mass communication. I had a masters in communication studies. It's all about PR too, it's just what they choose to call it. Also, while I was still in school, I went through the certificate stage of the Institute of Public Relations examinations. I wrote some then I just dumped it along the line because the essence of writing the exam was to get me membership, but I got my membership by the time I got my HND.

Oh, okay. So did you receive any formal training by the NIPR or your organization to be able to practice public relations effectively?

I have received a lot of training, and I am still being trained.

Okay. Within your organization or externally?

In and out. I have had training in Nigeria, externally in Singapore, United Kingdom.

Okay. Sir, would you please tell me how you would define public relations?

Well you know we have the general definition of public relations that says it is the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, and advising organizational management. That is one of the most acceptable definitions that has grown up with us. But well, public relations in this part of the world is all about what we call managing the reputation of an organization to ensure growth or profitability. Just trying to make sure that the image is right for you to have the right business environment to achieve the organizational aims and objectives. So that is what I believe PR is all about.

So sir, would you consider public relations in Nigeria to be more of an occupation or more of a profession?

In Nigeria, yes, maybe for so many people it’s just an occupation. So many people get into the profession by accident, not because they were cut out for it. When you look at somebody like me, I remember those days we were preparing for JAMB. I wanted to be a lawyer, but by accident I came to read mass communication. Immediately I started reading mass communication, I realized I couldn’t have done something else. I discovered what you call PR today. I discovered public relations. Have you heard of Orakatete?

No Sir.

It was one of the first PR textbooks written by a Ghanaian. It was one of the first PR textbooks that came to Nigeria. Then you now have something like Victoria Ajala – In Search of Professional Excellence. She was a lecturer
in the University of Ibadan. Then some first international books that came to Nigeria included Sam Black – Introduction to Public Relations. So those first times, those were the books I was chewing. I will use that word. I used to chew those books cover to cover. I read Orakweta then to me, Victoria Ajala’s was like a bible to me. Then Sam Black, I read. So for me, I discovered that for most of the things I do, PR becomes a way of life – the way I relate to people. Even in church, PR has become a way of life. So yes, for me it is a professional thing. But I have met people who are practicing people just as an occupation.

So what positions do public relations practitioners in your organization typically hold? Is it more of an executive management position, or more of a technician position?

It's executive. Fortunately, I had the opportunity of setting up PR in this organization. I have been here for quite some time, so I started here. I did my I.T. here so that was where the love of PR came in, and I met somebody who was good in PR and I learned under him. So I came here and I set up the unit. Even though I was a fresh graduate just coming up, I was not just any person in the organization. By rank and promotion, I wasn't there, but every other thing that makes you to be seen as a management person, I had in my portfolio. So I was within management.

So is public relations part of the major decision making of this company?

Yeah. There is no decision that is taking without PR. At least let PR just be there to observe and if you have anything to say to redirect the direction that the decisions are going, then you have that opportunity. Most of the things that we do we have PR there. So it is a management function. Management meetings, we are seated. Major meetings that are being held, if I am not there, somebody has to represent PR.

So PR in this organization is more of a department than an individual, yes?

Yes. That's what I said. It is a department. So it's not about the individual. It is not me. It is the department. So I am there representing public relations in the unit, in the department. That is what is done. So it is a department, not a person.

Okay. So is this department subject to higher authority in the organization or outside the organization?

Yes. Just the M.D. I report to the M.D., and once in a while, I have the opportunity to relate to the chairman. Some years ago we were under government, so that would have been a different arrangement. We are a private sector now so we have a board, the board reports to the chairman, so once in a while I get the chance to relate with the chairman.
So are you part of that board as well?

No I’m not.

Oh Okay. Are there any rules or regulations that bind the public relations practice in this organization?

When you are talking about rules, there are no rules. I know the CEO is the chief PR person of the organization, but I am the professional on ground. So what I tell them, they do, because they believe that I am qualified enough to advice; that I have the capacity to tell them the direction to go. So the trust has been built. I am not just coming into the profession, so when I say something, it means that I can see the bigger picture and you have to listen to me. It’s not them drawing rules. It is for me to caution them on their rules; after they have taken decisions. In PR that’s why they say think globally, but act locally. We here have a goal, and the goal is to provide ground handling services. It is not a PR organization. It is a ground handling company. So you are now talking about PR in a ground handling company. When we move to management meetings, we are talking about ground handling, not PR. Decisions that will be taken that will affect the customers is where I need to contribute, because PR is no longer about damn them; damn the public. You have to hear the public, and when you are taking the decisions that are anti-PR, I should be able to see the big picture. Any business that does not take into consideration public sentiment, that means that it will fold up. If you don’t have the public on your side, then it means that you should be thinking of how to go out of business.

Ok. So are PR practices in your organization bound by the code of ethics of the NIPR?

Yes.

Oh, they are?

Well if you say that, yes, we know that we have codes of conduct, and every business or organization should have codes of conduct. I continue to tell people that any organization or system that is not run by discipline is just a matter of time. Like I just said, this is ground handling, and ground handling also has codes of conduct, but I am a PR person in a ground handling organization, so I have rules that bind me. And we have NIPR that regulates the practice of that rule. Just recently, we elected the president and I was in Abuja for that. So that means that I subscribed to the ethics of the organization – that is the association – and so I operate under their codes of conduct. For example, I am a paying member of the institute – fully paid. So it’s part of the conducts that I have to pay to practice, so I pay my dues. For those 14 years, I have never owed NIPR, and it is part of it. And my organization recognizes that cause it’s not even me that pays.
now, the company pays. If I need to be in any of their meetings, they pay to take me there. so that means we recognize what NIPR is doing and we are fully subscribed to that.

Sir, so would you please tell me some of the roles of public relations in this organization or some of the services you provide to clients?

First, it is a management function. We are there within the management cycle trying to advice the management on the do’s and don’ts, especially when public sentiment is involved. We do that. We are also at the fore-front driving every decision that has to do with public relations. So for every inquiry that comes that has to do with PR, even though it may not come through our office, the MD doesn’t take a decision on it until we are consulted. So we act as PR consultants to the management inside the organization. It is also our duty to draw up annual PR plans for the company, and when you are talking about PR, you now begin to talk about the various aspects and sections of PR. We are fully involved in and in charge of press and media relations within the organization, and it is our duty to monitor the industry, the sector, especially in the light of the media – knowing the direction the sector is going and we advise management on that daily. So we do a robust media monitoring. Also, when you talk about sponsorships, this is the unit that manages that within the organization. Like I said, it is a ground handling company, so this unit manages the advertising aspects of this organization. Event management in this place is out (inaudible word). There is no event that we are no involved in. for example the safety week is coming, we have to be part of them to ensure that we drive everything that has to do with the event. We have the board meeting, and we have to be around to manage the event aspect of it. And the retreat I just told you is coming up, we have to be there because it is an event, and so out expertise in event management is necessary and it is required. Of course we also manage the audio and visual aspects – anything that has to do with recordings and photography. We build up a pool for that. If anybody comes in and needs information on the company, or even within the company, they have to come to us. Of course we also manage the gifts. As an occupation, we have a pool of corporate gift items, so it is our duty to also look at that and at the end of the day, know the kind of gifts that we will need to drive other aspects. For example, we have a marketing unit and their duty is to drive the marketing needs of the organization and get more client to the company. But while they are doing that, there are areas that they will need PR support. For example, people are visiting the company on courtesy call, or business runs, so at the end of the day, we might need to give them something, so that comes from the PR unit. I will even tell you that we are into community relations. So I will even tell you that everything is built into this place. We relate with our environment and most times we need to reach the community and the media. The community are the stakeholders within the industry so we are also strictly
involved with that. We do a lot of staff relating too – relating with the staff. Also, we do some government relations too.

So Sir, you spoke about giving gifts. I have spoken with some people who have been concerned about public relations being associated with excess gift giving or money, and the brown envelope syndrome, and they call it a challenge to the profession. So what do you think about that?

I knew that question would come. I was so sure, because telling me where you are coming from, I can tell you it is a challenge in this part of the world. You know I said something. You should have picked something when I was talking. Sam Black made a statement. He said when you want to practice PR, think globally – so PR is PR anywhere, whether you are in the police force, whether you are in the presidency, PR is PR. But when it comes to application, you have to apply it locally. I have been fortunate to be trained in some other countries, but one of the best training institutions in Nigeria today is what we call Lagos Business School, and they have what they call their school of communication. So I have don’t quite some training with them, and even up till recently I just finished a training on optimizing corporate communicate skills, so I know some of the directions that we have. Nigeria is a unique country. No matter what you think you know, if you want to practice PR in Nigeria, you need a lot of wisdom. I don’t give brown envelopes. It’s worked for me. I am not the kind of person that gives you money to carry my story. That’s the essence of the brown envelope. You cannot threaten me with that. Even these days I don’t call journalists. When I want to give out certain stories – thank God for the internet – I file out my story and will get enough publicity that I need. So if I tell journalist that I need to see them, I get enough publicity. But the situation of the country has become so bad that even these journalists you are using, some of them have not been paid for months, so they are reporting as an obligation and they know that you have the money. Well we are Africans, so if somebody comes to your house that they haven’t eaten anything for how many days, will you not give them food?

I will, Sir.

But yes abroad it’s possible that you cook your food and you are eating and the person will have to wait because you did not plan for them, but you cannot try it in Africa - the Nigeria that I know. And you see that the corruption nature becomes a problem. Yet some people are doing it very well. For example now, at the end of the year, we normally say thank you to the media for having worked with us, so we have gifts, and I know many of them have been coming here. I have packaged some gifts for them. We do hampers at the end of the year. But that is the Nigerian mentality. But even in Nigeria today, you don’t organize an event and at least you don’t even package something that you can give out for what you may call transportation. Even if you don’t give, they will ask. That is how Nigeria
has become. But the country where you have just come from, it is not
done like that. Even the journalist is not interesting in your giving because
are well paid. But here, that person that has been in the media house
reporting stories from day to day has not been paid, but he just needed to
hang around that job because at least he knows that when he goes out,
he will get something from the organizations not his company. At the end
of the day, he can still put food on the table. That is the kind of situation
that many company's PR have found themselves in, in this country. And
they say “he that pays the piper, dictates the tune.” As result of that, some
media houses or some journalists have found themselves on the pay roll
of some organizations, so they have to do whatever the organization
wants. Some find themselves in those shoes. Even if they say “go and lie
in the paper” they will do that. But I don’t do that, but I’m looking at the
Nigerian environment. Sometimes people like us we talk about them
because we know there is a problem. We’ve gone outside the country.
Even yesterday here, for just a press briefing that we did, I was trying to
correct something and you know what the lady told me? That every year
we don’t send something to the editor. And I told her to please not drag
me into this. There are organizations every year; you know the budget that
they budget for editors and gatekeepers in the media houses in this
country? That’s why all the editors are the big boys. Go and check the
lives they live. They are getting fat fat appointments. For example, Reuben
Abati; that role should be an NIPR role, but because he’s been in the
Guardian here, and he has a wide mouth, so they thought, let’s
compensate that sector. Look at them. Its journalist that have been going
there, but those are not journalist roles. Those are PR roles. So it’s all still
the compensation up till the government level. So it is a problem, and it is
here with us. If you pretend that it is not there, the person is just lying. It is
there and part of the practice of this country. Even NIPR, if they invite
journalists, they will give them. They may not call it the brown envelope,
but I know that. Normally, every year what I do in January is bring my M.D
to just say thank you to the journalists at a luncheon. That is what I have
been doing, and I have successfully done it for so many years. But this
year, we decided to send some emails out that we are having that - we
call it the media chat or media interaction with our management. Normally
what I would do is give them lunch, and the items that we have bought, we
give to them. Do you know that the same day (inaudible phrase) they
wanted to use one stone to kill two birds. They said that they are broke
and they need money. They came to ask with delegation. Now they have
asked, and you need them. Not me. I didn’t even know that they had
called my M.D. they didn’t call me. I was just walking to International, and
someone said “Ah, thank God you are here. Come and hear what these
guys are saying.”

So can you think of any other factors in the Nigerian environment that are affecting the
practice of public relations in the country?
Well, we’ve come a long way and we’ve been fighting. It’s been a war for PR to take its place within this organization. The way it is today, PR is growing and even by position and recognition. But for some, because of the way they are presenting themselves, PR is just all about portfolio carriers. I can tell you this, and it is not pride, but there are some things that my M.D will want to do that he will not involve me because he knows I always say we are not here to pack rubbish. We are not a rubbish department. We know what we are here to do and we are doing perfectly well. So there are things that they will want to do that they will say not to involve me because they already know my direction toward it; I can’t tolerate it, so they rather take it somewhere else. So that is why there are some jobs that should be PR jobs, but other people are doing it because I can’t play that kind of ball. I have integrity. In short I run my PR with a lot of integrity. I have told you some factors in the area of the media. It’s not my issue. It’s a Nigeria problem, a Nigerian issue that the country needs to fight, and it is there everywhere. There is a lot of poverty on the land where a few people have hijacked everything. The poverty in the country has (inaudible word) the journalists and they looking for a way to come out of it. That is why the PR people are the only people that can have the ears for journalists to channel their problem. These days you cannot even say that giving something to the media is a bribe, unless you define it as that, cause even up till the presidency, they are giving. EFCC is giving. The police are giving, so it is no longer a bribe. It’s just that we need to look for another way around it. So that is actually one of the factors that affecting PR, so we have to address it as a Nigerian problem. But it is possible that it can be addressed, but first we have to be sure that the journalists are paid by the media houses. That is where the problem comes from.

Also, the NIPR really needs to do their work. We know that that place has been sleeping for a while. But I believe that a change is coming. With the new leadership in NIPR, the new president has the capacity to drive some of those changes. We have to really be sure that there is professionalism in the practice of public relations whereby every Tom, Dick, and Harry, cannot just go in and succeed in it. You will notice that those people that don’t even know anything about PR are the ones that are even making the money there because of the long legs that they have within the system. Just like if you don’t go through the medical school, you cannot practice medicine. If you are not a chartered accountant, you cannot practice accountancy. If you are not chartered as a PR person, you should not be able to practice. It’s the quacks that have driven us to some of these kinds of things. They believe that PR is organizing girlfriends for their oga at the top, carrying his portfolio and telling lies. They tell lies to cover the sins of the organization. I don’t lie in PR. I have never lied in my practice. When PR does their work very well, you don’t have to lie to people. It’s only when you don’t work your work that you begin to block certain things and
the Nigerian system likes that. I believe that PR is all about truth and full information. The way I could work with journalists is tell them certain things and why it should not be for media consumption because the essence of the media is not to destroy. It is to make things better. That is why in journalism we have what is called developmental journalism. If your essence is to make things better, I relate with you and tell you what you want to know, but also tell you this is why it should not be for public consumption. PR is all about building understanding and sowing goodwill. It is part of the tools that PR uses. If I have goodwill with you, why would you want to do something that will put me in a bad position? Even if your fat pocket depends on it, you can just look at it and understand what it will do to my organization.

Are there any organizational requirements for public relations practitioners in this organization?

We follow what NIPR wants. The organization works in line with the NIPR criteria. If we as an organization are not in line with what they are doing, they have the right to take us to court.

So the NIPR is not very effective?

That is where the issue has been.

So how do you think that public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in western countries or even globally?

Fortunately they respect us so much. They know that PR has achieved so much in Nigeria. If you look at the practice of PR in Nigeria, some other countries are just trying to come up. Yes, you now begin to talk about recognition. In western countries, they don’t do anything without PR. But Nigeria, as old as it is and as recognized as it is, people still carry the wrong understanding of the use of PR. That is where we are having problem.

Sir what do you think is the reason for that?

The Nigerian orientation itself. PR practitioners and the users of PR are Nigerians, and so much is wrong with the Nigerian nation. A lot is wrong.

So the profession is kind of a reflection of the society?

Yes. So there is a lot that is wrong, and until we visit that wrong in the country then every other thing will not fall into place. PR, like you have just said, is a reflection of the Nigerian nation. So yes, PR has been here, and it has come a long way in Nigeria especially with NIPR. Nigeria is so much respected in terms of how far we have come with PR, but we just know
that there is a negative use of PR, or wrong use of PR in Nigeria. In the advanced nations they are using PR very well. PR is being used for what it should be used for. That is why you see the government making mistakes every day. By the time they appoint some body to manage their media relations, you figure that they still don't go for the right people. They just look for some body that has a good face and can wear a good suit. So they still have a wrong understanding of PR, and they are doing that.

I do understand that in the Nigerian school system, public relations is not really recognized as a degree on its own, and there is no full blown curriculum for a public relations degree. So do you think that this could be responsible for a lack of appropriate and steady growth of the profession?

Well I know that in the educational aspect, the recognition of PR is coming up gradually. I can tell you that when I was doing my HND, I was even the one that was driving my lecturers into NIPR. Gradually the recognition is coming up. That is why the NIPR is weak. It should've been them that started that. Thank God somebody came at a point and started it at the master's level. The new man that is in there now has the capacity to drive things because he is one of the lecturers at that level too, and up till recently, he was still the one anchoring the program at the University of Lagos. The man is good. I know him very well. He used to be our chairman in Lagos here. I know it is NIPR that will drive it because if you wait for the university, no one will drive it. It is just a matter of time, and I know that they will be able to. For now, it is just a course under mass communication in most universities or polytechnics. That is what it is for now. There is no full degree in public relations for now. But somebody has to sit down with them and build up the curriculum. Somebody has to drive it, and it is the NIPR that has the capacity to do that today.

Ok. So I have found through the course of my research that a lot of departments are not called public relations. They are usually called public communication or public affairs or corporate affairs. What is the reason for that?

I know you will be surprised in what I am about to say. I am one of the persons that believe that children are not kids. We like to copy, and sometimes we copy very wrongly.

And by “We” you mean the Nigerian people?

Nigerians. We are very good at that, and every organization wants to be recognized by what is current. When I came in here, I think we started with public relations. At a point we entered public affairs. Then since I have been here, since 2000, the name of the department has changed so many times. When this place was sold, the CEO came and called it public communications. Now, it is corporate communication. So it's all about nomenclature. The Nigerian mentality is still very wrong. Hardly will you
hear any company calling the name of his PR department public relations any longer. They all killed all those things. Now the fact of the moment is that you need to belong. Public relations to them is just a common name. Whether you like it or not, all those duties are called public relations, but people just want to identify with what is current. That is just the mentality. It’s not that there is anything wrong with public relations.

Sir, so finally is there anything else you would like to tell me concerning professionalism and public relations in Nigeria?

Well, I will say public relations is still growing in Nigeria. Yes, there is lots of awareness. There are people that have the passion, and there are some that just feel like the job market is not there and need to go along that line, but what is key is that where PR is still having problem is at the top. The government has not really given it its place in the scheme of affairs, in the running of the country. We know that PR really has a lot to do in the state of affairs, in the running of Nigeria, and if government can give that recognition, that opportunity for the profession to grow, by recognizing them, by ensuring that the people that surround the president, advice the president, speak for the president are the right kind of people, then the respect that PR has will grow. NIPR needs to stand on their ground, and charge one or two people to court who are practicing PR without being members of the institute, then I believe that the system will sit up and we will be able to achieve the kind of practice that we want to achieve in Nigeria.

Thank you so much for seeing me Sir, I greatly appreciate your time.

It’s no problem.

PARTICIPANT 15

How many years of public relations experience have you had?

5

And do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

For public relations?

Yeah.

I studied English (inaudible word). So everything was basically experience.

Okay. Where did you get your English degree?
University of Abuja.

Okay. Are you a member of the Nigerian institute of public relations?

No.

Do you ever plan on becoming a member?

Not yet.

Why?

I don’t know anything about it yet. I’m just focusing on my work right now.

Okay. So in what areas have you worked previously with your public relations practice?

Customer relations.

Okay. And then now its entertainment?

Yes. Yes.

Did you receive any kind of training before you started practicing public relations?

No. None. For customer relations, yes. For MTN to have taken me, I had to do that. I had to do like a 3 months course for customer relations. I actually have the certificate here. It was called Customer Service Management.

Oh okay. So how would you define public relations?

There are different angles to public relations. I’m not sure how to describe it exactly.

I mean, from any angle that you’re familiar with; whether it’s entertainment, or anything else.

What is it to you?

I would define public relations as the establishment and management of the relationship between and organization and the people for which it serves; a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the people for which it serves.

So that’s what I said, from different angles – like in entertainment – different people are in it for different reasons. At the end of the day (inaudible statement). If I’m going to put it from my own angle, it is more of customer satisfaction, and job satisfaction.

So it is a mutually beneficial relationship?
At the end of the day, yes. We love what we do, but that’s different. It borders mostly on customer satisfaction. Because now, I’m here thinking Miguel is new and fresh and on the market, but not a lot of people will come out for him. But Brian McKnight is old and outdated but a lot of people love him. So at the end of the day what I am striving for is what I think will satisfy most of the masses. So that’s why I am saying for the most part it is more of customer satisfaction, then once that is gotten it is now job fulfillment for us. So yes, a mutual beneficial relationship.

Okay. So would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

Profession.

Why?

If I was trained fully in public relations, I would handle it better. I am using my day-to-day experience to just manipulate my way through. It was amazing to you that I do the magnitude of what I do alone. So if I had professional consultation I know I would have been on a different level at this point. So it would be easier to channel it that was as opposed to an occupation. That is what I think.

So you think that getting professional training to practice is more helpful?

Yes.

Okay. Do you think you would ever get that? The NIPR offers that.

Yeah. There are courses. I was considering doing stuff in January cause I usually don’t do anything between January and April. So I was thinking of doing like a three months course but finances are holding me back. But at the end of the day, I will eventually. There are like two or three courses that I have to take. I will just go away for a while, sort that out and just come back a better person. Of course you can only be a better person after training.

Right. Okay. So I know you’re your own boss, and you’re solo, which is still blowing my mind. What kind of duties do you as a public relations person perform?

Media and community relations mostly.

Have you ever had any kind of crisis? Because I know you put on these really huge shows.

This is the Nigerian environment. There always is. Behind the scenes are incredible. You almost go crazy. But the thing is like is aid, what I try to do is get professionals to handle different aspects of the event. So what I do is I deal with the heads. So once there is an issue, I just call the heads like “yo, whatsup? I thought we had this agreement. Why am I having these
issues?” So the guy that handles my sound and light is one guy. So he has the sound engineer and owns the company so he calls them into check. So usually, we have an agreement. I tell them what I want, the specifications, and we agree on how everybody is sorted. So I work with a team that I just head, but I’m not really their boss. We just work together. You bring your resources, I bring my resources, we put an event together and we advertise to everybody.


Yeah. So community and media.

And public relations in your organization is an individual which is you. So tell me why? It’s easier. If you want something done, you have to do it yourself.

Ok. So are there any internal or external rules that guide your public relations practice at all?

None.

Do you bind yourself by any formal codes of ethics or anything?

Basically, the customer is always right. Just the basic rules that are out there. At the end of the day, all I’m trying to do is create a market, satisfy that market, feed that market, continuously feed that market with different products.

Okay. So if you were to hire anyone, or if you were to bring somebody else into your own little team, what would you require of them? Would you require any certifications, qualifications or experience?

I would go for passion.

Okay. That’s interesting. Would you do any kind of training for people who you would hire?

They will learn on the job?

They will learn on the job?

Yes.

How do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations globally?

I haven’t been part of anything apart from Nigeria so…

But what you know. Look at it from the entertainment perspective.
Okay. I went to South Africa recently. They had 19000 people. I was with the guy that put on the event and he gave me a VIP pass, and they were so chill. They walked in with me, no one knew it was them. The décor was done, security was there, they were not talking to anybody. Everything was sorted out. The venue sorted out security and payment of ticket. Everybody was so organized, like I went crazy. I’m like if that was me, I would have been running up and down. It’s hard in Nigeria. (Inaudible sentence.)

So what do you think is the reason for that?

Our government. Government can’t help you. Government is selective with a few.

No I mean for the lack of like –

Nigerian problem now. Nigerian factors. Everything is goes back to the Nigerian factors.

What kind of Nigerian factors?

Light, African time, many Nigerian factors. It’s insane. You should know Nigeria. It’s a lot of work. Commitment and all.

Okay. This was an issue when I spoke with a lot of other people – the brown envelope and bribery. So have you run into incidents like that or do you think it is common in the entertainment industry?

It is common, but it is not bribery. I don’t know how to say it. It happens everywhere. I think in New York, there is something that I noticed. There are five or six artists that play every hour. Regardless of the song. You have to be part of that top five; like continuous play every hour. So there is something the record label is doing. You know what I mean? If I have an artist now and I want my artist to be on sound city, I have to make him be on sound city. In as much as the music is good, I also have to make him be on sound city. So it’s not bribery. I wouldn’t say that is bribery. It’s just part of the entertainment business. You have to pay your way. So it happens. It’s part of the business.

So it’s just part of the business, and is not bribery.

It’s not bribery. I wouldn’t say its bribery.

Would you agree that there is a kind of lack of appreciation of public relations in Nigeria?

Yeah I would. Of course.

What do you think is responsible for that?
The Nigerian factors. Everything is government. The only thing that gets priority is oil in Nigeria. Any other industry suffers. Aviation, transportation, everything is suffering. So it’s not just public relations. It’s a Nigerian thing.

So basically what is good for the government is what is the priority?

Basically. That is what is killing our industry. How much will entertainment do?

But you know it’s interesting how the government is now doing like more entertainment.

It’s only a matter of time. Like I said, individuals have now decided to start doing their thing, so government will obviously want to support. It’s growing. It is. Where it was before is not where it is now. Artists like Eedris Abdulkareem and Tony Tetuila used to get 300 or 400 thousand. Now Wizkid is getting 4 million. It’s a huge difference. Actors like Liz Benson and the rest probably used to take 100k, 50k, now these ones are collecting over a million, 2 million.

So there is just a growing appreciation for it?

Yes. Any business-minded person will invest in entertainment cause its growing.

So in what context do you think public relations is mostly used in Nigeria? I know you work in entertainment, but politically and other areas?

Yeah, they have all their public bureau and all of those. They have organizations. Do they work? I don’t know. But the government has some organizations. That even works better than us. But if they work I don’t know.

Do you think an organization can survive without public relations?

No. It can’t. Public relations is everything.

Alright. I like when people talk like that cause I’m a public relations person.

It’s just growing. That’s all. Because we don’t understand public relations in Nigeria. It’s a growing market the same way everything is growing. By the time it is grown people will now start getting a better understanding of it. It is a professional course. That is why people talk about structure in a company. You just have to have public relations. Every major company has public relations. They have somebody in charge of what we call publicity.

Right. Or public communication. I have run into some people who have called it public communication.

They just try to look for a name for it because there is nothing binding or concrete as public relations.
Yeah. I’ve actually spoke to someone who says a lot of firms actually separate themselves from public relations because public relations is attached to the whole bribery and corruption thing. So people try to separate themselves from it because they don’t want to be identified with it.

Yeah. That’s what I’m saying. There is nothing binding on it.

Okay. Well thank you so much for making time to speak with me! I appreciate it.

Oh you’re welcome. I hope I didn’t disappoint you.

Not at all.

PARTICIPANT 16.

How many years of public relations experience have you had?

I had 4 years with the Jigawa state governor, and then I had other jobs before I came here. I’ve been here for about 5 or 6 years now.

Do you have any certifications for your public relations practice?

Yup.

Which?

NIPR.

Oh okay. How many years is your membership?

About 4 or 5 years now.

And to what level do you belong?

Full member.

Apart from working here and the Jigawa state government have you worked in any other areas with your PR practice?

Jigawa was my major experience; my major assignment. I had to do the practical things.

Oh okay. Your undergraduate degree was in business management you said?

Yeah.
Do you have a graduate degree?
Yup.
What is that in?
Marketing.
Oh okay. So no degree at all in public relations or communications?
None.
Okay. Did you receive any formal training by your organization or the NIPR for your public relations practice?
Yeah.
Both?
From NIPR yes, but from my organization, it’s on the job training.
So it kind of ongoing training and learning as you go.
Yes. Basically, PR is more like an integral part of marketing.
So how would you define public relations?
How would you define it?
I would define it as a management function that serves to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and the publics for which it serves.
It goes beyond building relationships. Good-will; generating good-will is important. Establishing relationships and sustaining them is also very important in public relations. In the real sense public relations is actually very (inaudible word). But within the divide, public relations has actually been limited to just very few things. When you say public relations, the first thing that comes to people’s minds is press releases, masquerading words or coining words to suit whoever; generating positive public perception or entrenching positive perception of a brand either an entity, a company, or a product, in the minds of the consumers or the perceiver. But the truth is, it goes beyond that. Its way more than that.
So what do you think is responsible for that?
So for me I think basically it is the function of the society we are in and also those in charge of, or the body in charge of public relations.
The NIPR?

Yes.

How so?

Because in the real sense, you cannot be a respected accountant if you are not chartered. You cannot be a medical doctor without reciting the creed. So what stops us from saying you cannot be an effective PR person without -

Belonging to the NIPR?

Probably. Or a body regulating and saying it’s not really all about press releases. It’s not just that. CSR is there, and they are not doing anything about it. They just want to run one promotion, make it colorful, and let people think it’s actually very good. There are so many other things that they are supposed to be looking at that could actually generate a positive perception of the brand for the company or for the organization. But in the real sense, we all look at what will make the loudest noise and that is what we all stick to. But there are some little things that you would do that the noise won’t be there, but would affect lives directly, and would entrench your brand, or you as a caring loving brand. When you are able to do that, positive perception will set in. At the end of the day, your relating with them is more like building relationships with them, and you realize that you must have cut across some of these things. The noise would not be there but you would have achieved something. There are two things; what we call the water boom effect. If I want to make noise, I can actually spread one liter of water over this table. This table will get wet at the surface. In the real sense is like if you touch it, it’s just on the surface. You make the noise, but it has no depth. One thing about the water boom is that you realize that at the end of the day the water dried up almost immediately. The truth is if I take it and I drop it on a spot, it will sink deep in and it retains there for a longer period and over time it begins to spread. But the society that we are in is all about spread not depth. So really, I think that is what is killing us here. And most of our people here are just about the money money money.

Well I have a question about that because PR – a lot of the time – is synonymously associated with the brown envelope and money exchanging hands. A lot of people have expressed concern about this kind of being a challenge in the practice and profession in the society so what do you think about that?

Let me say this. A professor once told me something. He said color black actually contains all colors. It depends on the right shade or intensity of light that turns it to the right color. In the same way, brown envelopes and the exchange of benefits has actually become the order of the day when it comes to PR. But in the real sense, I would say it goes beyond that.
Generating good will and positive perception for yourself must come at a cost. That’s just the truth. But where we get it all wrong is we sell our dignity to promote hype and generate goodwill for something that we know is a lie.

So even if it’s true, does that make it right?

If it’s wrong it’s wrong. If it’s right, it’s right. Someone called me just now and said they want me to place an ad in their school magazine. Of course I would gladly pay for the run off page or the back page cover for a full-page ad. But for me doing that doesn’t really sell my brand. It doesn’t really give me that experiential engagement I want. People will get to see me and forget about me. I would love to create an experience; look for a way to give that child an experience whereby tomorrow that child would see my brand and remember that positive experience. So I told her I could have something like a game where kids could answer a question and text and win something. In the context of what we are talking about, you look at it as what if I pay people to celebrate me, or to celebrate what I’ve not done just to get positive good will which is what we do here basically? You see the governors take pictures of one street. Take the edited version of that picture and tag it 100 days in office and project done so far. Most people don’t even know what’s going on there but the media will take it and run with it, and make noise and get brown envelopes. For me I will just say here in Nigeria, PR we lie a lot. Am I right?

Well I am not exactly part of the system so I can’t answer that accurately.

What about out there?

I won’t say it’s exactly lying. A lot of people just try to put their best foot forward, sometimes it not always a lie. But when I talk about the brown envelope I mean sending in a press release and getting replied with a demand to pay before it is published, or they want you to give them something even when you are not supposed to give them something.

That’s the norm, and that is what I was trying to say.

Right. And so I’m saying that because it is the norm, is it still a challenge to the profession?

It is. It is a challenge to the profession in the real sense. Because at the end of the day, if I pay you, you are obliged to do what I want you to do. If I send you a brown envelope, you are obliged to do my will. So if the press release I have sent to you is not right or not true, you might end up using not my own words, but something else that would coin it; something that would still mean the same thing to a lay man, but something else to someone in that field. So to me I think it’s a challenge. Really, it is a challenge. However, those in the system do not really appreciate those in PR and in
the media as a whole. In this part of the world, they are not really appreciated; they are not really remunerated, and this affects them, their mentality and psyche to see how best they can make whatever out of whatever situation that comes their way.

Okay. Well would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession and why?

For me I think it depends. But I think it’s more of a profession.

Why would you say that?

I think it’s more of a profession because you’re supposed to live it. For me that’s the way I see it. It is who you are, and what you represent. So it should be a profession.

Well by profession I mean the global standards of professionalism like a code of ethics, a body of knowledge, a professional institution, things like that.

It’s supposed to be a profession. But here it is an occupation.

Why?

Those of us within the category of the corporate setting, it is a profession. But to those that are out there –

Out there being?

The media. They take it more as an occupation. There should be a standard. Most of us within the corporate setting managing brands take it as a profession, but those out there – which is actually the larger society or larger community – it’s more of an occupation.

So PR as a field or an industry, would you consider that to be a profession in Nigeria?

No. No. But the flip side of it is actually professional.

What is the flip side?

In Nigeria it is not. But in the real sense, that is what it should be.

Okay. In this organization, what position do public relations practitioners or professionals typically hold? Is it like an executive management position or more of a technician position?

Executive management position.

Okay. Who is responsible for making the difficult decisions in this organization?
CEO’s and top management.

Is the public relations management all part of that process?

Yeah.

Is public relations in this department a department or more of an individual?

It’s a department. The CCU.

Corporation Communications Unit?

Yeah.

So it’s not called public relations?

Yeah. Here it is not called public relations.

Okay. Are public relations practitioners in this organization subject to any higher authority?

Yeah.

And are there any organizational requirements for public relations practice or practitioners? Do they need certain degrees or certifications to be able to practice public relations?

Yeah.

Which ones?

Mass communication, marketing, professional certifications.

They have to be members of the NIPR?

Yes.

Is there a training process for members of this organization by the organization or by the NIPR or any other external organizations?

Periodic trainings.

By the organization?

Yes. Periodic seminars, symposiums, workshops –

And these are all internal?

Yes. Sometimes the company pays and we go and attend.
Oh, so some are external?
Yes. Yes.

So are there any internal or external rules that bind the public relations practice of the practitioners here?
None.

So you don’t have a code of ethics here for the public relations or the CCU departments?
I think we do.

You think?
I’m flexible. I am not exactly part of the CCU. They are the major PR for the mother brand. I just manage a smaller brand under that, so I can do things and get away with it. There are things that I can do that they can’t do because of the regulations. Despite the fact that there are things that I can do, there are still regulations. It may just be easier for me to wiggle my way through. They have more structure because they manage the parent brand.

Okay. How do you think public relations in Nigeria compare to public relations in western countries or even globally?
Public relations in Nigeria in the real sense, is more like child’s play. But gradually, we are beginning to gravitate towards what PR used to be in the 60’s and 70’s in the global market. We are beginning to gravitate toward that. Those in the entertainment industry actually are the ones making this happen because entertainment is an affair.

So would you say that most PR is concentrated in the social sector?
Yes. The social sector. The social sector has actually been able to push at a certain pace in recent times. However, the corporate sector seems a bit rigid. There are things we can do, there are things we can’t do. But the social sector is a bit more flexible, and it’s quite easy for them to download or copy paste what is happening out there.

Out there being other countries?
Yeah. But in the corporate world it’s not that easy.

What’s the reason for that?
Most companies want to make money. That’s the basic thing. But the government policies here are quite different from what it is out there. Most companies
out there have actually gone way beyond what we are. We are just starting. We are still way behind what PR should be in the corporate sector. Where we are today is where they were probably in the 80’s. So if we decide to download the trends and the PR mechanics over there and deploy here, it is actually going to affect us. We will spend more, get goodwill or not. However here, it is a gradual thing. We can jumpstart it to get to that level, but the social sector or the entertainment industry is easy for them to copy paste because every individual in the entertainment world wants to be like them, and each time you see those out there, you compare to those here immediately. And of the standard is not equal to the person out there, you begin to see them as inferior. But it is the job of the PR person to download what is out there and employ here. I want to be one of the fortune 500 companies but I cannot just wake up one day and adopt the mechanics that they use out there. It’s going to kill my brand.

Okay. The principles of public relations globally should be the same. The dynamics are what should differ depending on the place. So do you think that what we are doing is just not working, or are there factors in our society, maybe culturally, traditionally, politically that are maybe affecting public relations practice?

Yeah.

How so?

Government policies, social control, individuals, yeah. They all affect it; even the environment. Everything in this part of the world. Like you said the dynamics differ, but in the real sense the global objective remains the same.

So are there specific factors in the Nigerian environment that you think are slowing the growth of the profession? Some people have said education is an issue, a lack of adequate training, and things like that.

Yeah there are quite a number of them. Level of literacy.

By literacy do you mean the people practicing or the people being served?

Both. Across the board it’s both. Policies also cripple the sector - government policies, civil policies. For me, literacy level and policies for those within the PR sector.

Finally, is there anything else you would like to tell me with regards to public relations practice and professionalism in Nigeria?

We have a very very bad public image out there. Sincerely.
Oh that’s true. I’m not arguing.

Once they know you’re Nigerian, they begin to study you. Even the way they attend to you at the airport is different. I think we need to really redeem our image. We need a good PR person to change the image out there.

A good PR person, or a good PR people?

Okay, good PR people. We need good PR people to actually re-orientate and rebrand us. What do you think?

I think it starts on a personal level. I don’t see how we can rebrand the country without first rebranding the people in it. That’s the foundational starting point.

That’s why they say “it begins with you”.

And you! Maybe us. Absolutely. Well thank you for your time!

I hope I have been helpful.

Yes, you have. I appreciate it.

PARTICIPANT 17

How many years of public relations experience have you had?

Basically, I have had 8 years of public relations experience?

Okay. Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

I won’t say for public relations itself, because I myself have a BSc in marketing. I studied marketing. So basically you know public relations is just what you can take out of marketing. But in terms of handling public relations as a course, maybe doing a program on it, I have not really done that yet.

Are you a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations?

No, I’m not a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

Do you ever plan on becoming a member?

I will. If I have the time I will do that.

So apart from the area in which you are currently working, in what other areas have you worked?
I have worked as an operations person before. I was an operative officer. But basically, when I started my career, I started as a marketing person.

So did you receive any formal training by this organization or any other organizations for effective public relations practice?

No. For public relations practice, I have not been trained by any organizations. But I have been trained on the field. Right now I am in the protocol department, so I have been trained on protocol issues.

So how would you define public relations?

Basically, I will just say that public relations is bridging the gap between organizations and the audience or the general public. You know some people always ask what public relations is about. It is just cementing the relationship between the public and maybe an organization. Then it now depends on the kind of outfit it is. If it is government related, there is what we call public relations, and in the private sector or in the media sector too, they have their own way of defining public relations. So it depends. But for me, it is just bridging the gap between an organization and the public. That’s all.

So do you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

Really I wouldn’t want to take public relations as a profession.

And why?

Because basically every one of us practices public relations, but we don’t know we do it - in our job functions and in whatever we do. Like now as a protocol officer, I do practice public relations because I interface between my organization and the public. I meet with authorities – government authorities. I do the public relations between my organization and them, so that our jobs can run smoothly, and my own people can enjoy such facilities of what we call public relations.

So what positions do public relations practitioners in your organization usually hold? Is it just a technician position or is it an executive management position?

Basically, we have the head of communication and we also have the head of corporate services. You find the head of corporate communication handling the majority of what we call the public relations of the company. They interface with the media representative, they also interface with bigger bodies in terms of packaging. What I mean by packaging is the goodwill of the company; they are the ones that really project the image of the company.

So like image management?
Image management. They manage image, they manage events, they manage a lot of things.

So it’s more of a management position?

Yes. It is more of a management position.

So apart from the duties that you’ve just mentioned, are there any other duties that public relations practitioner in this organization perform?

I don’t really see much. In terms of public relations, I don’t see practitioners practicing much, but at least they have to bridge the gap between the organization and the other audience.

Okay. So you talked about head of communication and head of corporate services. Would public relations in this organization be those individuals, or is it a department?

Why I called the two departments are, since they don’t have a public relations department as a public relations department, they can easily pick what they do. The functions of the public relations officer or the public relations unit, from their own functions they can pick them from there. They can easily pick what they do, who they meet, how they do it, and all that. Those kind of duties can be taken out of the two departments. So as a public relations person, you can term them to be a public relations unit.

But your organization doesn’t recognize the as public relations?

No. they don’t recognize them. Instead of that they call them corporate communications and corporate services.

Okay. So are they subject to any higher authority within the organization or even outside the organization?

Yeah. Yeah. Just within the organization. Within the organization, the head of corporate communication reports directly to the M.D; The Managing Director or the C.E.O. So you can see that it is a very sensitive department.

Yeah. Are there any internal or external rules or regulations that bind the public relations practice within this organization?

There should be, but I don’t really know the terms and the rules of such practice.

But there are some?

There should be.

Are there any organizational requirements for the practice of public relations?
Our company is an aviation handling company, but they also have other departments too. The need of hiring a public relations officer won’t come in because we also have commercial communication officers. So basically they deal with commercial. So we basically operate on the kind of departments that we create. So if we create a public relations department for ourselves, I don’t know if they will have much to do.

Okay, so there is no real value of public relations to this organization?

Yeah.

Okay. I know you said you didn’t undergo any training for your public relations practice. So your organization didn’t provide any training at all for the practice?

No.

Okay. So what department in this organization is responsible for making the difficult decisions?

It depends on the nature of the decision. We have different departments that make different decisions.

So is the corporate communications unit part of this process?

No. They don’t. Especially when it has to do with risk management. Their opinion may be asked for, but they are not the major solution makers.

Oh okay. So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations globally?

You know I said I have a background in marketing. So sincerely, to tell you, the public relations in Nigeria is very poor. It is because of this inability of organizations and governments having good public relations units. That is where we are having a lot of problem. They don’t have good public relations units. They don’t have people that were well trained on that. So the gap they leave on an organization matters a lot. Even in Nigeria, a lot of companies don’t even have public relations departments.

Do you think that there are other departments that do public relations work but are called something else?

Yeah. Like I told you, if you merge corporate communication and corporate services, they do the functions of public relations but are called different names.

Alright. So what factors such as culture or tradition in the Nigerian environment do you think affect the practice of public relations? I have spoken to some people who have addressed the brown envelope issue. Do you think that is a factor? And what other ones can you think of?
You know when you say public relations, in Nigeria they call it PR, and when they say PR what they mean is money; the exchange of money. They don’t know the real definition of public relations. Exchange of money and exchange of gifts – that is the Nigerian mentality of public relations.

Okay. So what are some factors that may be responsible for the lack of growth and development of public relations in Nigeria? I know earlier you talked about the government and the lack of training and appreciation of public relations.

People have to be more enlightened about what public relations is really about. They should be educated more, and more emphasis should be leaned on what public relations is all about. Not about money, not about wanting to assist people.

Are you talking about training functions or are you talking more about school education?

First we should go to the basics – school. The school should make sure that public relations is taught in a better way and in a more pronounced way. That is one. Then two, this education should involve training and also practice what you have been trained on. Public relations can be included in the curriculum of the schools. It will grow from there.

In what context do you think public relations is most appreciated and most used in Nigeria?

I believe the oil sector. They really make use of that. And also the economic sector. They also make use of that. Production companies also use it. International companies like Guinness also use them.

So is public relations mostly used by international companies or Nigerian companies?

International companies. Even the social side of it, you still find that it’s the international companies that are contributing to this side of it.

Okay. Well that concludes the interview. Thank you so much for your time. I greatly appreciate it.

No problem, no problem.

PARTICIPANT 18
How many years of public relations experience have you had?

Like 10 years.

Okay. Do you have any qualifications or certifications for your public relations practice?

No.

Are you a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations?

No.

Do you ever plan on becoming a member?

Maybe later in the future.

In what areas have you worked with your public relations practice?

Basically customer service.

Okay. Do you have a graduate or undergraduate degree in public relations?

No. I read accounting.

Okay. Did you receive any formal training for this organization or any external organization for your public relations practice?

Yeah. By the bank.

Okay. So how would you define public relations?

It has to do with your day to day activities with your customers – how you relate with them, interact with them, and how you pass the message of your products and services to them that will be well received by them.

So would you consider public relations to be an occupation or a profession?

I can say a profession.

Why?

Because I came into this industry just like an ordinary person. I was trained to function effectively by my employer, and to date now I can say that I am a better person, and I’ve taken it as a profession already because I am good at what I’m doing.

So is public relations in this organization just you, or is it a whole department?

A whole department.
What is it called? Is it called public relations, or corporate communications –

Like I said, mine is on customer service. So its effective customer service delivery.

So it’s a customer service department.

Yes.

So is this customer service position a technician position, a management position, an executive position? Where does it rank in your organization?

Well that’s the bedrock of our service.

So it’s foundational.

Yes.

Are public relations practitioners in your organization subject to higher authority within the organization or outside the organization?

Both.

With whom?

Internally we have a department that regulates and makes sure that everything works how it’s supposed to be. We call them the customer engagement department. Then externally, we join the global world in October to celebrate the international customer service week. We always have a week to celebrate with the whole world. There are things that we do in that week that coincide with global practice.

So is there anything else apart from customer service that public relations in your organization does to serve its clients?

There are so many things. If you have a very good PR, you will be a better person. People tend to want to listen to you when you talk, and you have people around you always. A good PR person is outspoken, has the product knowledge, and can easily sell anything. Even if it is wrong, they will still believe what he is saying.

So how would you differentiate marketing form public relations?

I think they work hand in hand. I can’t differentiate or separate the two.

Okay. Are there any rules or regulations that guide the practice of public relations here. You talked about celebrating international customer service week. Does the international body have any rules or regulations that this company abides by?
Yeah.

And you have your own here too as a company?

Yes.

So I guess we already talked about this, but there is a training process for new comers into the organization?

Yes.

Is this training internally or externally?

Both.

And externally by whom?

We get people from the UK, from the U.S.

So are public relations practitioners in your organization required to have any kind of certification or training or qualification to be hired?

No. Like I said, I came in plain. There is what we call on-the-job training. So there are things they need you to know and how they expect to carry out your day to day activities. We’ve been trained. So that’s what we need.

Ok. What department in your organization is responsible for making the difficult decisions?

Management.

And is public relations part of that management?

Yes.

So how do you think public relations in Nigeria compares to public relations in global countries?

We are still learning. There they have a stable economy and adhere to rules and regulations. Here things are done differently, so we have our own challenges and our own style of doing that. But we are still learning.

Do you consider our style effective?

Well on a scale of 1-10, I will give Nigeria like a 6 or 7. We are still okay.

What factors in the Nigerian environment, in culture or tradition do you think affect the practice of public relations? I have talked to people who say that public relations is associated with money exchanging hands and things like that.
I would say basically in the Nigerian terms, if you talk about PR, you are talking about money. A lot of factors are affecting that. Before you can sell something to someone or even make somebody want to hear you, you have to tip the person so that your product can be aired.

Do you consider that as an ok practice?

It’s not that it’s an okay practice. It has to do with the poverty level of the country. Nobody wants to do anything for free. Even what you have that is free, you want to get something for it.

Speaking about poverty, what other factors do you think have affected the growth and development of public relations in Nigeria?

Literacy and product (inaudible word).

Any more?

Ignorance. I can say ignorance.

Do you think that the government affects the practice of public relations at all?

Yeah.

How?

Because of you have set rules and standards that are being followed and are being well implemented then all these other factors will not come into place. But the lawmakers are the breakers of the law.

In what context do you think public relations is most used in Nigeria?

It has to be the private sector. Those are the drivers of the economy, and any good policies and stability you see so far are probably found in the private sector, not in the public sector.

I was talking to someone who differentiated even among the private companies, international or global companies and local companies, and said that international public relations practice better public relations than the local companies because of their exposure. Do you think that’s accurate?

I don’t think it is because of exposure. Even those international companies you’re talking about, there is this African factor that they have to look into and know. The way they are they can easily buy off anybody to make them believe.

So the Nigerian factor is basically the money factor.
Yes. On a good day, I should’ve asked you what my benefit is for doing this interview. But I am not like that?

So personally your values of public relations are different from the national values of public relations?

Yes.

So what do you adhere to? Your personal values, or the national values of public relations?

Personal values.

Do you think that will be effective?

My personal values are a collection of all the things I’ve learned. We can’t just continue to do things the wrong way because by the time you get to a structured society you will not be able to fit in.

So do you think that mentality is going change?

Some of us are changing that already. We have started. Things cannot just be the same way. Things have to be done differently. So some of us believe that and we stand for the change.

Okay! Well that concludes the interview. Thank you so much. I greatly appreciate this.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Serumun Ubwa is from Benue State, Nigeria. She attended Hillcrest Elementary School starting 1996 from grade 1-5, after which she left for Bethany Christian Academy, a Nigerian boarding school, in 2001. She graduated in 2007, and wanted to further her education in the United States. Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA, was her choice for an undergraduate education, and in 2012 she earned her Communications degree with a concentration in public relations. Following her passion for the profession, she pursued a graduate degree in the same field, and earned it from the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, in 2014.