The Nigerian Journal of Communication, 21 (1&2) 2025

A Review of Public Relations Prescriptions for Governance and Social Welfare in Nigeria

Terfa IGBE (Ph.D)[1]
terfaigbe981@gmail.com

Anwam TARNAHA (Ph.D)[2]
anwam.tarnaha@neu.edu.ng

&

Caleb Terngu CHILE (Ph.D)[3]
ternguchile@gmail.com

[1,3] Department of Mass Communication, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria
[2] Department of Mass Communication, North-Eastern University, Gombe, Nigeria

Abstract

Social welfare policies and programmes are meant to alleviate sufferings in the society especially where there are many social problems. Public relations has a lot of potentials to improve governance of social welfare programmes. This paper therefore review literature on the role of public relations in promoting good governance and social welfare in Nigeria. The objective of the study are to analyze the current state of public relations practices in Nigeria and their impact on governance and social welfare outcomes; review key challenges and opportunities in the field of public relations for enhancing governance and social welfare in Nigeria. The study used literature overview method of 48 literature on public relations and social welfare in Nigeria. Result of the review indicate that there is strong relationship between PR and social welfare; PR practices experience challenges that stem form socio-economic environment that affect its performance for welfare issues in Nigeria. The study therefore concludes that despite the challenges, literature show that PR is not utilized effectively for governance and social welfare. The study therefore recommends engaging stakeholders and building relationships, utilizing digital communication channels, and implementing public awareness campaigns as ways of public relations can enhance governance and social welfare in Nigeria.

Keywords*:* Prescriptions; Public Relations; Governance; Social Welfare;

Introduction

Social welfare is a fundamental aspect of human development, encompassing various dimensions such as income security, healthcare, education, and social inclusion. In Nigeria, a country with a diverse population and significant socio-economic challenges, the issue of social welfare is critical for ensuring the well-being of its citizens. In fact, security and welfare of the citizenry is the sole purpose government exists. However, the effects of Nigeria's historically negative credentials in governance manifesting in its poor resource management and political corruption is reflected in the poor state of welfare and general development gridlock. This correlation has been well documented (Gary and Karl, 2003; Action Aid Nigeria, 2007; Eboh and Igbokwe, 2006; Ogun, 2010 cited in Abegunde, 2014). The capacity to effectively provide for the welfare and security of her citizens is a critical responsibility of the state and its decision-making machinery—the government. Oshelowo & Oniemola (2011) have pointed out that effective service delivery is coterminous with the development aspiration of any country.

Ogbonna (2017) averred that a good way to gauge how well a society is doing is by asking about the social welfare and seeing if people are happy. In the society, as part of phenomena seen in the societal development, certain people, need some level of assistance either due to their disposition or because of the environment they find themselves; they require some social welfare assistance to enable them cope with the social problems arising from daily activities and living conditions. Social problems in Nigeria include out of school children, unemployment, poverty, prostitution, destitution, child trafficking, child abandonment, armed robbery, divorce and problems of single parenting. These issues above are the major social problems that need serious social welfare policy and programme to handle them.

Social welfare is defined as a wellbeing of the entire society which concerns the quality of life that include factors like quality of environment, level of crime, extent of drug abuse, provision of necessary social services, religious and other aspect of life e.g. spiritual life. Social welfare denotes the full range of organized activities of voluntary and governmental agencies that seek to prevent, alleviate, or contribute to the solution of social problems, or to improve the wellbeing of individuals, groups, or communities. It provides support, protection, and welfare to disadvantaged people like orphans, handicapped, mentally or chronically ill. It is a major component of health services. There is increasing number of orphaned children who cannot afford basic needs like health care, education, and good nutrition. If not catered for they grow up disadvantaged to the detriment of the society.

According to Osam (2022), despite the enormous natural resources and wealth in Nigeria, the few welfare national social welfare schemes meant to cater for the needs of Nigerians. An effective national social welfare scheme would enhance the well-being of Nigerian citizens, reduce the current level of poverty, and prevent the insecurity that has caused Nigeria to slide towards becoming a failed state. Having a good social welfare scheme is part of a good governance system. Good governance involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentials. Human beings have certain basic requirements which must be satisfied so that they can properly

function in the society. Among these are enough food, employment and the elimination of the kinds of inequality which leads to poverty.

Governments in Nigeria have over the years tried to enact policies and programmes such as the Sure-P during the Goodluck Jonathan's administration 2011-2015, National Social Investment Programme by the Buhari's administration of 2015 – 2023; National Health Insurance Scheme, Renewed Hope Cash Conditional Transfer Initiative, etc. These programmes though conceived with lofty ideas but they hardly work effectively as expected. One component that can help improving the effectiveness of social welfare policies and programmes is the public relations. Public relations plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, building trust, and facilitating dialogue between government institutions and citizens. In Nigeria, where there are challenges of welfare programmes, the need for effective public relations practices in governance cannot be overstated. This paper aims to review the potential of public relations as a tool for promoting good governance and enhancing social welfare in Nigeria. The following objectives guided the study:

1. To analyze the current state of public relations practices in Nigeria and their impact on governance and social welfare outcomes.
2. To review key challenges and opportunities in the field of public relations for enhancing governance and promoting social welfare in Nigeria.
3. To propose actionable prescriptions and strategies for improving public relations practices to address governance issues and enhance social welfare in Nigeria.

Methods

This study adopted secondary data relying on literature review of different scholars. The paper is structured into first x-raying the background, statement of the problem, research objectives, conceptual framework, theoretical framework and review of related literature. A narrative review of the literature was conducted from June, 2024. The researchers searched Google scholar, Google, and the web. Initial literature search yielded about 102 publications on public relations and social welfare. On further evaluation 48 were found more related to the topic and used for this narrative review. Another reference list of relevant sources included books, magazine, and print academic journals. Article publication date ranges from 1993 to 2023. Search words and phrases included public relations, governance, and social welfare in Nigeria. The resources gathered were then analyzed thematically in line with the research objectives.

Public Relations

Public relations is a concept that has many definitions. The Institute of Public Relations (IPR), United Kingdom commonly called British Institute of Public Relations (BIPR) and now referred to as Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in 1969 states that public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics (Aina, 2001). Also, at a meeting of more than thirty national and regional public relations associations in Mexico, 1978 quoted by Ajala (2001) adopted a definition usually called "the Mexican Statement". It says, "public relations is the

art and social science of organization trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and public interest".

Several scholars and authors observe that this is the best and most acceptable definition of public relations, universally. For instance, Black (1989) submits that of all the current definitions of public relations, the best is the Mexican Statement. That explains why most researchers and authors almost always make reference to the Mexican Statement in attempt to elucidate the subject matter of public relations. This study also adopts the Mexican Statement. This is because of the encompassing nature and scope of the definition i.e. organization trends and predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action. This could be applicable to public relations, governance and social welfare in Nigeria.

Governance

Simply put governance means: the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance (United Nations, n. d). Since governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision.

Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government that is under discussion. In rural areas, for example, other actors may include influential land lords, associations of peasant farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions political parties, and the military (United Nations, n. d).

The situation in urban areas is much more complex. At the national level, in addition to the above actors, media, lobbyists, international donors, multi-national corporations, etc. may play a role in decision making or in influencing the decision-making process. All actors other than government and the military are grouped together as part of the "civil society." In some countries in addition to the civil society, organized crime syndicates also influence decision-making, particularly in urban areas and at the national level (United Nations, n. d).

Similarly, formal government structures are one means by which decisions are arrived at and implemented. At the national level, informal decision-making structures, such as "kitchen cabinets" or informal advisors may exist. In urban areas, organized crime syndicates such as the "land Mafia" may influence decision-making. In some rural areas locally powerful families may make or influence decision-making. Such, informal decision-making is often the result of corrupt practices or leads to corrupt practices. Governance refers to the process of decision-making and the way in which authority is exercised in the management of a country or organization (Kooiman, 1993). It involves the structures, processes, and mechanisms through which power is wielded and decisions are made to achieve common goals and objectives (Rhodes, 1996). Governance encompasses not only formal institutions and regulations but also informal norms, practices, and

relationships that shape how individuals and institutions interact within a society (Pierre & Peters, 2000).

In a broader sense, governance is about the distribution of power, accountability, and responsibility among different actors in society, including government entities, civil society organizations, businesses, and citizens (Bovaird & Löffler, 2003). It reflects the principles of transparency, participation, responsiveness, and effectiveness in decision-making processes and the management of resources (Graham *et al*., 2003). Good governance is characterized by inclusivity, integrity, and the ability to balance competing interests to promote the common good (UNDP, 1997).

Overall, governance plays a critical role in shaping the functioning of societies and organizations, influencing how resources are allocated, policies are implemented, and outcomes are achieved (Held *et al*., 1999). Effective governance is essential for promoting stability, accountability, and the rule of law, as well as for fostering economic development, social cohesion, and sustainable growth and social welfare (World Bank, 2017).

Social welfare

Social welfare is the organized system of social services and institutions designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health, and personal and social relationships that permit them to develop their full capacities and to promote their well-being in harmony with the needs of their families and community (Crompton, 1980 cited in Irele, 2019). According to Johnson, Schwartz and Tate (n. d) social welfare encompasses social work, public welfare and other related programmes and activities.

Social welfare is a system of laws, programmes, and benefit services geared towards meeting the social needs of people in the society which will enhance the wellbeing of individuals, groups or communities. The most widely accepted definition of social welfare is given in the Encyclopedia of social work, which states that: Social welfare is an organized effort to insure a basic standard of decency in relation to the physical and mental well-being of the citizenry. It is characterized by a large complex of interlocking and preventive and protective laws and organizations designed to provide at the least, universal access to the mainstream of society. It involves the ever present, active assistance to individuals and groups to facilitate their attaining and maintaining a respectable life style (cited in Irele, 2019).

Social welfare activities are programmes designed specifically and made available to selected people within a nation. The various definitions of social welfare portray social welfare as being able to promote the well-being and also promote a better functioning of the social order. Social welfare refers to the well-being of individuals and communities, encompassing various aspects such as access to basic needs, healthcare, education, and social support systems (Baldock *et al*., 2011). It is a multidimensional concept that reflects the overall quality of life and the extent to which individuals have their needs met within a society (Titmuss, 1974). Social welfare policies and programmes are designed to promote social justice, equality, and the provision of essential services to vulnerable populations (Midgley, 1999).

In a broader sense, social welfare involves the collective efforts of governments, organizations, and communities to ensure the welfare and dignity of all members of society (Mishra & Singh, 2019). It is rooted in the principles of social solidarity, human rights, and the redistribution of resources to address inequalities and promote inclusive development (Ringen, 1988). Social welfare initiatives aim to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities by addressing social determinants of health, economic security, and social inclusion (Karger & Stoesz, 2018).

Overall, social welfare represents a fundamental aspect of a just and equitable society, where individuals have access to essential services, opportunities for personal growth, and support in times of need (DiNitto & McNeece, 2008). It reflects a commitment to ensuring that all members of society can lead fulfilling lives and participate fully in social, economic, and political activities (Popple & Leighninger, 2019).

Theoretical Framework: Advocacy Theory

This study is anchored on Advocacy Theory. This theory was formulated by Paul Davidoff and Linda Stone Davidoff in 1965. It is a pluralistic and inclusive planning theory where planners seek to represent the interests of various groups within society. Davidoff (1965) was an activist lawyer and planner who believed that advocacy planning was a necessary method for representing the low-income and minority groups who were not always on equal footing with the rich and powerful. The theory stems from the desire to facilitate people to defeat barriers while achieving their objectives (Grande, 2004). Davidoff understood that not all stakeholders are equally represented and involved in the planning process, thus, leaving the groups of lower socioeconomic status vulnerable to the interests of larger public institutions or private companies. Without sufficient protection and care, the concerns and opinions of these individuals were left unheard and unaccounted for when developing plans. Davidoff realized that it was necessary to implement a humanistic, grassroots and pluralistic (Davidoff, 1965) system where planners would advocate for the interests of the oppressed and powerless.

In practice, Grande (2004) has averred that advocacy planners use their experience and knowledge within the field of planning to represent the ideas and needs of their clients. These clients are often groups of lower socioeconomic standing who are unable to access the resources, tools or skills to represent themselves. Advocate planners work with these disadvantaged groups to develop plans which incorporate and preserve their social and economic needs.

The plans are then produced in front of a planning commission where they consider the various pros and cons of each plan produced by other advocate planners. This is what Davidoff claimed would lead to a rigorous and systematic legal methodology of fair notice and hearings, production of supporting evidence, cross-examination and reasoned decision (Davidoff, 1965).

Davidoff believed that upholding the political ideology of democracy through the planning process led to three major improvements within his discipline. First is the raising of the public's awareness. By employing a method of participatory planning and engaging with the wider community, this helps the public to realize that planning is not simply a process engaged by well-educated men of science, rather that the best planners are the people themselves. It is the realization

that the public has the freedom and choice to develop plans according to their needs (Davidoff, 1965).

Secondly, this ideal structure for advocacy planning allows planners to compete among themselves while representing the views of their clients. Healthy amounts of competition should in fact raise the standard and quality of planning practices and outcomes. Davidoff acknowledges that conflict keeps people honest (Davidoff, 1965).

Thirdly, O'Hare (2010) has averred that rather than critiquing the planners and institutions that support them, those that are critical are given the opportunity to instead provide input and feedback on the plans with which they disagree. Creating an environment that encourages positive attitudes towards constructive participation. However, simply providing a platform for expression is not always sufficient. Participatory and democratic planning requires a certain level of critical consciousness from the individual participating, otherwise they may struggle to identify problems without being aware of the larger social and economic forces that influences their choices. Moreover, aspects of capacity building and advocacy can themselves, somewhat ironically, serve to restrict autonomy by creating an over-dependence upon facilitatory bodies and advocates (O'Hare, 2010). The role of the advocate then, must be not only to provide assistance in developing an appropriate plan for the committee to judge, but must also be to encourage the people to be free, informed, participating to the fullest degree, working together cooperatively, possessed of an understanding of their problems and those of their fellow men.

Advocacy Theory is highly relevant to social welfare in Nigeria as it provides a framework for understanding and promoting social change, influencing policy decisions, and advancing the well-being of marginalized populations. In the context of Nigeria, where issues such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to essential services persist, Advocacy Theory can be a powerful tool for advocating for the rights and needs of vulnerable groups and driving positive social outcomes. One key aspect of Advocacy Theory is its emphasis on raising awareness, mobilizing support, and influencing decision-makers to address social issues and promote social justice (Banks, 2006). In Nigeria, where disparities in social welfare outcomes are prevalent, advocacy efforts can help shine a spotlight on these challenges, generate public discourse, and push for policy changes that prioritize the well-being of all citizens. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and advocating for their rights, Advocacy Theory can contribute to more inclusive and equitable social welfare policies in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Advocacy Theory underscores the importance of building coalitions, fostering partnerships, and engaging with stakeholders to drive collective action towards social change (Jenkins & Zimmerman, 2018). In the Nigerian context, collaboration among civil society organizations, community groups, government agencies, and international partners is essential for advocating for improved social welfare outcomes. By forming alliances, sharing resources, and coordinating advocacy efforts, stakeholders can amplify their impact, leverage diverse perspectives, and advocate for comprehensive solutions to address systemic challenges in social welfare.

Moreover, Advocacy Theory highlights the role of strategic communication, evidence-based research, and data-driven advocacy in influencing policy decisions and shaping public opinion (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). In Nigeria, where data on social welfare indicators are crucial for informing policy-making and monitoring progress, advocacy efforts grounded in research and evidence can provide a compelling case for policy change. By using data to highlight disparities, demonstrate the impact of social welfare interventions, and advocate for evidence-based solutions, advocates can effectively influence decision-makers and drive meaningful reforms in the social welfare sector. Advocacy Theory offers a valuable framework for advancing social welfare in Nigeria by promoting awareness, mobilizing support, building coalitions, and advocating for evidence-based policy solutions. By leveraging advocacy strategies to address systemic challenges, advocate for marginalized populations, and drive policy change, stakeholders in Nigeria can work towards a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable social welfare system that prioritizes the well-being of all citizens.

Public Relations Practice in Nigeria and its impact on governance and social welfare outcomes

Public relations practice holds significant implications for government organizations' reputation management, stakeholder engagement, and public perception. Effective public relations can enhance business growth, promote transparency, and contribute to sustainable development (Omojunikanbi & Thomas, 2023. Public relations involve strategic communication efforts aimed at establishing and maintaining favorable relationships between organizations and their various stakeholders. Public relations focuses on building and nurturing relationships between organizations and the communities in which they operate. The ultimate goal of public relations is to establish a strong sense of shared values and trust within the local community.

According to Omojunikanbi & Thomas (2023), public relations (PR) practice in Nigeria holds significant implications for various aspects of society, including government, businesses, media, and public perception. These implications are shaped by the country's cultural, political, and economic dynamics. The evolving nature of public relations in Nigeria has led to both positive and negative consequences, influencing how organizations and the public engage with one another.

One implication of public relations practice in Nigeria is its impact on government communication and transparency. Effective PR strategies are essential for governments to convey their policies, initiatives, and achievements to the public. However, challenges in maintaining transparency and addressing public concerns can lead to skepticism and mistrust. This highlights the need for ethical and accountable PR practices to bridge the gap between the government and citizens (Okigbo, 2014). The implications of public relations practice in Nigeria are multifaceted and dynamic, encompassing government communication, business reputation, media relations, cultural sensitivity, and digital engagement. Effective public relations can foster transparency, build trust, and facilitate meaningful interactions, while ineffective or unethical practices can result in public skepticism and reputational damage. To navigate these implications successfully, public relations practitioners must adhere to ethical standards, adapt to cultural diversity, and embrace the evolving digital landscape. In the business realm, public relations play a pivotal role in shaping

corporate reputation and consumer perception. Effective public relations can bolster brand image and build stakeholder trust, which is crucial for long-term business success. On the other hand, misleading public relations efforts can lead to reputational damage and a loss of consumer confidence. With Nigeria's diverse market and competitive landscape, organizations must tailor their PR strategies to resonate with the local culture and values (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2017).

Media relations is another key implication of public relations practice in Nigeria. PR professionals collaborate with media outlets to disseminate information and shape news coverage. However, this collaboration can sometimes lead to biased or skewed reporting, affecting the accuracy of public information. The ethical responsibility of public relations practitioners to maintain journalistic integrity while fostering productive media relationships is paramount (Udoakah, 2015). Social and cultural implications also arise from public relations practice in Nigeria. The country's rich cultural diversity requires public relations practitioners to navigate various linguistic and cultural nuances in their communication efforts. Neglecting cultural sensitivity can lead to misinterpretations and miscommunications. Thus, public relations professionals must adopt culturally inclusive strategies to ensure their messages resonate with diverse audiences (Edegoh, 2016). The digital age has transformed public relations practice, introducing new implications related to online reputation management and social media engagement. Organizations must monitor and respond to online conversations, as public sentiments can spread rapidly across digital platforms. The instantaneous nature of social media requires public relations practitioners to be vigilant and adaptive in managing online interactions (Nwachukwu *et al*., 2019).

Historically, Nigeria has experienced periods of political turbulence, with instances of marginalization and unequal distribution of resources among its diverse population (Awofeso, 2017). This has resulted in a need for strategic interventions to bridge gaps, promote understanding, and cultivate a sense of belonging among all segments of society. Recognizing the importance of inclusiveness in the nation's political landscape, there is a growing awareness of the role that Public Relations (PR) can play in shaping perceptions, fostering dialogue, and contributing to a more unified and inclusive society (Olusoji, 2019).

According to Grunig & Hunt (2017), public relations, as a strategic communication discipline, holds the potential to influence public opinion, build trust, and facilitate meaningful engagement between the government, institutions, and the diverse citizenry. Nigeria, as a nation with diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, and regional differences, faces persistent challenges in achieving socio-political inclusiveness and social welfare for the citizens. The intricate social fabric has led to tensions and disparities in political participation and representation. Historical instances of political turbulence, marginalization, and unequal resource distribution underscore the need for strategic interventions to bridge societal gaps and foster a sense of belonging among all segments of society. The imperative to create an inclusive socio-political environment, where all citizens feel represented and heard, is crucial for Nigeria's ongoing development. Despite this awareness, achieving inclusiveness remains a formidable task, requiring public relations prescriptions that will enhance understanding government social welfare policies and programmes.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Field of Public Relations for enhancing Governance and promoting Social Welfare in Nigeria

Public relations (PR) practice in Nigeria is fraught with numerous challenges that stem from the complex socio-political and economic context of the country. These challenges significantly impact the effectiveness of public relations efforts in building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations and their audiences. Several key issues need to be addressed to improve the state of public relations in Nigeria. The Nigerian media landscape presents a challenge due to a lack of professionalism and widespread sensationalism (Olowu, 2017). This makes it difficult for public relations practitioners to communicate accurate and well-crafted messages to the public. Moreover, the rise of social media has contributed to the spread of misinformation and fake news, further complicating the task of managing reputations (Ogunyemi & Adegoke, 2018). There is a shortage of skilled public relations professionals in Nigeria, exacerbated by the absence of standardized education in the field (Ejiogu, 2018). This results in subpar execution of public relations campaigns and a lack of understanding of public relations strategic importance.

Political interference and corruption can greatly impact public relations efforts. The government's control over the media and the reluctance to allow dissenting voices can hinder transparent communication (Okorie, 2019). This is evident in instances where public relations campaigns are used to propagate political agendas rather than serve the public interest. Nigeria's cultural diversity also poses a challenge for public relation professionals, as messages must be tailored to resonate with various ethnic and linguistic groups (Olaniyan, 2020). Effective communication requires a deep understanding of the cultural nuances of different regions, which can be challenging to achieve.

Economic instability and poverty can limit access to communication channels, making it challenging to reach target audiences effectively (Uzuegbunam, 2019). Moreover, the lack of reliable data and research tools can hinder public relation professionals from making informed decisions about their strategies (Okereke & Emeka, 2018). There is also a lack of recognition of public relation's strategic role within organizations, leading to its underutilization in decision-making processes (Nwosu & Edegoh, 2017). Public relation is often seen as a tactical, reactive function rather than a strategic, proactive one. The lack of trust and gender inequality is one of the serious challenges of public practice in Nigeria. Issues of trust and credibility plague the Nigerian public relation landscape. Past instances of misinformation and deceitful communication by both public and private entities have eroded the public's trust in official statements (Nwosu, 2017). Issues of gender inequality persist within the public relation industry, with fewer women occupying leadership positions (Ejiogu, 2018). This imbalance hinders diverse perspectives and can influence the nature of communication strategies.

Asemah (2019) opined that governments whether military or democratic must have the support and acceptance of the citizenry so as to be effective and to even survive for a reasonable period. This is because, any government whether democratic or military, that fails to win public

acceptance, is heading towards a serious landslide as there will be anarchy and this will make the government to lose its image. Thus, Nwosu (1996) opines that in theory and practice, every government derives its legitimacy or the right to govern from the people or citizens. So are government policies and programmes. This presupposes that for government programmes on social welfare to succeed, they need public relations to play a crucial role. Public relations plays an important role in democratic governance. It stands to reason therefore, that no government or its programmes will be able to achieve its aims and objectives without effectively relating with its publics. Public relations is all about creating mutual understanding through action, information and communication management. It mainly entails enriching people's knowledge and using action to affect proper understanding (Asemah, 2019).

The recognition and acceptance of public relations as a vital communication link and a useful tool in the hands of government in all modern societies cannot be over-emphasised. And as the number and size of both governments and organisations' publics increase with development, communication links between the government and the different publics are seriously disrupted, complicated and rendered ineffective in most cases. People are therefore unaware of what their governments are doing and as a result, goodwill and understanding can be elusive and difficult to come by (Asemah, 2019). Consequently, sustained public relations communication becomes essential if governments and organizations are to explain their actions and policies to the publics in order to secure, maintain and enhance public understanding, acceptance and goodwill thereby reducing distinctive conflicts and ultimately averting crisis. Public relations has also acquired added importance when governments, companies, social and political organizations recognize in the course of daily business that they have a social responsibility to serve the public. Again, the increasing public criticisms of both government and business organizations and the tendency of the citizens to challenge all forms of exploitative activities have further informed the basic needs of public relations in the field of public affairs.

Prescriptions and Strategies for improving Public Relations Practices to Address Governance Issues and Enhance Social Welfare in Nigeria.

Research has shown that public relations can contribute to improved governance by fostering transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in public institutions (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). In the Nigerian context, public relations can help bridge the communication gap between government officials and the public, leading to increased citizen participation in decision-making processes (Okorie & Onah, 2017). Additionally, effective public relations strategies can enhance the credibility of government actions and policies, thereby building public trust and support (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). According to Asemah (2019), Public relations is a major part of the political process in any country. The roles it plays include promoting political parties and candidates for elective offices, selling government programmes, publicising government policies and programmes, promoting special interests and facilitating popular participation in governance. In general, public relations provides beneficial linkages among government, business and people,

enabling them to work together optimally for the progress of the nation. Mohammed in Nwosu (2007) cited in Asemah (2019) observe thus:

> The most important contribution which public relations can make towards the process and management of political power is to break the barriers of ignorance. We must begin to explore the ways of ensuring that majority of the people in this country whether they reside in the rural or urban areas are constantly informed about government policies. Lack of information and understanding of the actions and programmes of the holders of political power can be very detrimental to effective democratic governance. Providing essential information will lead to proper interpretation and execution of plans and programmes which will result in good will and public acceptability.

This is to say that public relations whether for government, the quassi public enterprise, parastatal or the private enterprise can modestly be taken from the acceptable angle of the definition of leading experts which see public relations as the systematic way of promoting mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. The government as an institution is an organization and can only succeed when it maintains mutual lines of communication between itself and its citizenry. Public relations in government in brief is the concerted efforts of the government officials to establish appropriate and effective communication system that enables them to produce, project and sustain government's goals, aspirations, programmes, activities and policies to reach the ultimate beneficiaries of the programmes, in most cases, the community. public relations is employed in various ways to help the government to establish mutual lines of communication for effective exchange of ideas and perspectives between it and the governed, and also to create a positive image for the government both locally and internationally.

Improving public relations practices is crucial for addressing governance issues and enhancing social welfare in Nigeria. Effective communication and transparency are essential for building trust between government institutions, the public, and other stakeholders. Strategies for improving public relations practices in Nigeria to address governance challenges and promote social welfare, supported by relevant citations include:

(i) Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

One key strategy for improving public relations practices in Nigeria is to enhance transparency and accountability in governance. Transparency is essential for building trust with the public and ensuring that government actions are perceived as legitimate and ethical (Asemah *et al*., 2020). Public relations professionals should prioritize open communication channels, timely dissemination of information, and proactive engagement with the public to increase transparency in decision-making processes (Okorie & Onah, 2017).

(ii) Engaging with Stakeholders

Another important strategy is to actively engage with stakeholders, including civil society organizations, community groups, and the media. Stakeholder engagement is crucial for understanding the diverse perspectives and concerns of different groups within society and building

consensus around governance decisions (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). Public relations practitioners should establish regular dialogues, solicit feedback, and involve stakeholders in policy discussions to promote inclusivity and participation in governance processes.

(iii) Leveraging Digital Platforms

In today's digital age, leveraging digital platforms and social media channels can enhance public relations practices and reach a wider audience. Government institutions in Nigeria can use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to disseminate information, engage with the public, and address governance issues in real-time (Oyedele *et al*., 2018). By embracing digital tools, public relations professionals can amplify their reach, improve communication effectiveness, and foster greater citizen engagement in governance matters.

(iv) Building Capacity and Professional Development

Investing in training and professional development programmes for public relations professionals within government agencies is essential for enhancing their skills and competencies in stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, and strategic planning (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Continuous learning and capacity building can equip public relations practitioners with the knowledge and expertise needed to navigate complex governance issues, build relationships with stakeholders, and communicate effectively with the public.

(v) Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is critical for assessing the impact of public relations initiatives on governance outcomes and social welfare in Nigeria. Public relations practitioners should track key performance indicators, analyze feedback from stakeholders, and conduct regular evaluations to measure the effectiveness of communication strategies (Macnamara, 2012). By monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes, organizations can identify areas for improvement, adjust their strategies accordingly, and demonstrate accountability to the public.

Implementing these strategies for improving public relations practices can contribute to addressing governance issues and enhancing social welfare in Nigeria. By prioritizing transparency, stakeholder engagement, digital communication, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation, public relations practitioners can play a pivotal role in promoting good governance, fostering citizen participation, and ultimately improving the well-being of the Nigerian population.

Discussion

This review of the literature on public relations and social welfare show that there is strong relationship between public relations practice in Nigeria and its impact on governance and social welfare outcomes. This finding is supported by works of several scholars such as Omojunikanbi & Thomas (2023) who averred that public relations practice holds significant implications for organizations' reputation management, stakeholder engagement, and public perception as effective public relations can enhance business growth, promote transparency, and contribute to sustainable development. According to them, public relations (PR) practice in Nigeria holds significant implications for various aspects of society, including government, businesses, media, and public

perception. These implications are shaped by the country's cultural, political, and economic dynamics. The evolving nature of public relations in Nigeria has led to both positive and negative consequences, influencing how organizations and the public engage with one another. The above findings are also supported by Grunig & Hunt (2017) who are of the conviction that public relations, as a strategic communication discipline, holds the potential to influence public opinion, build trust, and facilitate meaningful engagement between the government, institutions, and the diverse citizenry. Nigeria, as a nation with diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, and regional differences, faces persistent challenges in achieving socio-political inclusiveness and social welfare for the citizens.

The review also show that public relations (PR) practice in Nigeria is fraught with numerous challenges that stem from the complex socio-political and economic context of the country. These challenges significantly impact the effectiveness of public relations efforts in building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations and their audiences. The findings are supported by Olowu's (2017) study which found that the Nigerian media landscape presents a challenge due to a lack of professionalism and widespread sensationalism and this makes it difficult for public relations practitioners to communicate accurate and well-crafted messages to the public. Moreover, the rise of social media has contributed to the spread of misinformation and fake news, further complicating the task of managing reputations (Ogunyemi & Adegoke, 2018). Ejiogu (2018) also found that there is a shortage of skilled public relations professionals in Nigeria, exacerbated by the absence of standardized education in the field. This results in subpar execution of public relations campaigns and a lack of understanding of public relations strategic importance. Okorie (2019); Olaniyan (2020) have agreed that political interference and corruption have greatly impact public relations efforts. The government's control over the media and the reluctance to allow dissenting voices can hinder transparent communication. This is evident in instances where public relations campaigns are used to propagate political agendas rather than serve the public interest. Nigeria's cultural diversity also poses a challenge for public relation professionals, as messages must be tailored to resonate with various ethnic and linguistic groups as effective communication requires a deep understanding of the cultural nuances of different regions, which can be challenging to achieve.

Further review on prescriptions and strategies for improving public relations practices to address governance issues and enhance social welfare in Nigeria show that strengthening communication channels; building capacity by investing in training and development programmes for public relations professionals within government agencies can enhance their skills in stakeholder engagement and strategic communication; engaging civil society by collaborating with civil society organizations and community groups can help amplify public voices, promote dialogue, and hold government accountable for its actions; and leveraging technology by embracing digital tools and social media platforms can enable government institutions to reach a wider audience, disseminate information effectively, and engage citizens in policy discussions are some of the active public relations prescriptions for governance and social welfare in Nigeria. The above findings are supported by Sriramesh & Verčič (2009); Okorie & Onah (2017); who have averred

that improving public relations practices is crucial for addressing governance issues and enhancing social welfare in Nigeria. Effective communication and transparency are essential for building trust between government institutions, the public, and other stakeholders. They have highlighted strategies for improving public relations practices in Nigeria to address governance challenges and promote social welfare, supported by relevant citations include: Enhancing transparency and a; accountability; engaging with stakeholders; leveraging digital platforms; building capacity and professional development; monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Nigeria, public relations practices play a crucial role in shaping public perception, building trust, and facilitating communication between government institutions and the public. Effective public relations strategies are essential for addressing governance issues and enhancing social welfare outcomes in the country. Some prescriptions for improving public relations practices in Nigeria to tackle governance challenges and promote social welfare are enhancing transparency and accountability as by enhancing transparency, government agencies should proactively provide information to the media and the public through press releases, official statements, and public announcements. Public relations professionals can also facilitate open dialogue between government officials and citizens through town hall meetings, public forums, and online engagement platforms. By fostering a culture of transparency, public relations can help build trust and credibility in government institutions. Improving public relations practices is critical for addressing governance issues and enhancing social welfare in Nigeria. By enhancing transparency and accountability, engaging stakeholders, utilizing digital communication channels, implementing public awareness campaigns, and investing in training and capacity building, government agencies can strengthen their communication strategies and build trust with the public. Ultimately, effective public relations practices can contribute to improved governance outcomes, increased citizen engagement, and enhanced social welfare in Nigeria. Some specific recommendations include:

1. Engaging Stakeholders and Building Relationships: Effective public relations practices involve engaging with various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, community groups, the media, and the private sector.
2. Utilizing Digital Communication Channels: In today's digital age, leveraging online communication channels is crucial for effective public relations.
3. Implementing Public Awareness Campaigns: Public relations can be instrumental in raising awareness about governance issues, social welfare programmes, and community initiatives.

References

Abegunde, O. (2014). Public policy, welfarism, and social service delivery in Nigeria: The case of a receding state. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 22 (1), 134-144.

Anifalaje, K. (2017). Implementation of the right to social security in Nigeria. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 17(2), 413-435.

Asemah E. O. (2019). *Public relations and democratic governance in Nigeria: A componential overview*. Jos: Jos Printing Press.

Asemah E., *et al*. (2020). The role of transparency in good governance: A conceptual perspective. *Journal of Public Affairs.*

Awofeso, O. (2017). Socio-political development in Nigeria: From 1960 to 2015. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 11(1), 1-9.

Banks, S. (2006). Ethics in an epidemic: AIDS activism and the challenges of civil society. *Journal of the International AIDS Society*.

Bovaird, T., & Löffler, E. (2003). *Public management and governance*. Routledge.

Davidoff, Paul (1965). *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning*. The City Reader.

Edegoh, O. (2016). Public relations, culture and sustainable development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 14(1), 1-15.

Ejiogu, C. (2018). Women and Public Relations Practice in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 10(1), 1-12.

Graham, J., Amos, B., & Plumptre, T. (2003). Principles for good governance in the 21st century. *Policy Brief No. 15. Institute on Governance*.

Grunig, J. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (2017). *Excellence theory in public relations: past, present, and future*. Routledge.

Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D., & Perraton, J. (1999). *Global transformations: Politics, economics and culture*. Stanford University Press.

Irele, A. O. (2019). The evolution of social welfare and social work in Nigeria. *A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 16(4), 64 – 85.

Jenkins, J. C., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2018). Advocacy in action: The fourth approach to ethics in the public relations discipline. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics.*

Keghku, T. (2005). *Public relations and the Nigerian economy*. Makurdi:Aboki Publishers.

Kooiman, J. (1993). *Modern governance: New government-society interactions*. Sage Publications.

Macnamara J. (2012). *Evaluating public communication: Exploring new models, standards, and best practice.* Routledge.

Nwosu I.E (1996) *Public relations management principles, issues and applications*. Lagos: Dominican Publishers.

Nwosu, E. (2017). Issues in contemporary Nigerian public relations practice: a critical appraisal. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 9(2), 32-141.

Nwosu, E., & Edegoh, O. (2017). Public relations role in leadership and governance in Nigeria: An appraisal. *International Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 9(7) Pp. 89-97.

Nwosu, I. (2006). *Mass communication and national development*. Aba: Frontier Publishers.

Ogbonna, B. O. (2017). Social welfare scheme; a neglected component of public health care services in Nigeria. *MOJ Public Health*, 5(3), 101–104.

Ogunyemi, S. & Adegoke, R. (2018). Fake news phenomenon in Nigeria: Implications for journalism and national development. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 10(2), 20-35.

O'Hare, Paul (2010). Capacity building for community-led regeneration: Facilitating or frustrating public engagement? *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 30(1/2), 32–47

Ojo, O., & Adeyemi, T. (2017). Public relations and corporate social responsibility practices in Nigeria: A study of selected banks. *Public Relations Review*, 43(5), Pp. 925-933.

Okereke, E., & Emeka, A. (2018). Public Relations Practice in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects in the Digital Age. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 10(3), Pp. 48-62.

Okigbo, C. (2014). Public relations, government communication and public accountability in Nigeria. *In The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development* (pp. 537-549). Palgrave Macmillan.

Okorie N. C., Onah F. O. (2017). Public relations as a strategic tool for national security management in Nigeria. *Journal of Strategic Security*.

Okorie, N. C., & Onah, F. O. (2017). Public relations as a strategic tool for national security management in Nigeria. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10(2), 70-85.

Okorie, U. (2019). Media control and freedom of expression in Nigeria: An appraisal. *International Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 11(1), Pp.13-23.

Olaniyan, A. (2020). Language and Communication in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 8(3), 1-10.

Olowu, A. (2017). Crisis communication management in Nigerian tertiary institutions: lessons from the past. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 15(1), 85-100.

Olusoji, O. (2019). The role of public relations in promoting social inclusion in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Relations Research and Management*.

Omojunikanbi, N. C. & Thomas, W. N. (2023). Public relations practice and community relations: the implications and challenges. *International Journal of Advancement in Education, Management, Science and Technology*, 6(2), 49 – 61.

Osam, E. (2022). The lack of a national social welfare scheme is an impediment to social work practice in Nigeria. *Journal of Agriculture, Forestry and the Social Sciences*, 20(1), 84 – 105.

Oyedele A., *et al*. (2018). Social media utilization by government agencies in Nigeria: opportunities for participatory governance. *Government Information Quarterly.*

Pierre, J., & Peters, B. G. (2000). *Governance, politics and the state*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996). The new governance: Governing without government. *Political Studies*, 44(4), 652-667.

Sabatier, P. A., & Jenkins-Smith, H. C. (1993). *Policy change and learning: An advocacy coalition approach.* Westview Press.

Sriramesh K., Verčič D. (2009). *The global public relations handbook: Theory, research, and practice*. Routledge.

Sriramesh, K., & Verčič, D. (2009). *The global public relations handbook: Theory, research, and practice*. Routledge.

Udoakah, K. (2015). Media relations practice in Nigeria: An appraisal of ExxonMobil's corporate social responsibility programs. *Public Relations Review*, 41(2), 256-264.

UNDP. (1997). Governance for sustainable human development: A UNDP policy document. United Nations Development Programme.

Uzuegbunam, E. (2019). Media Challenges in Nigeria: Implications for Effective Public Relations. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 11(2), 109-119.

World Bank. (2017). *World development report 2017: Governance and the law*. World Bank Group.