



## Perception of Global Public Relations Management: Challenges, Issues, and Implications at UNIUYO and AKSU

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates students' perceptions of global public relations (PR) management in Nigeria, focusing on undergraduates from the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) and Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU). The research is anchored on the Excellence Theory, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, and the Professional Competence Theory, providing a framework to examine how cultural, ethical, and technological issues shape the reception of global PR in developing contexts. Employing a survey design, a stratified random sample of 380 students was drawn from an estimated population of 20,000. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicate that cultural barriers (78%), technological limitations (65%), and ethical dilemmas (59%) significantly influence students' perceptions of global PR. Case studies including Coca-Cola's 'Share a Coke' campaign, Shell's Niger Delta crisis, the 2021 Twitter ban in Nigeria, and MTN's regulatory disputes were used to contextualise findings. The study concludes that global PR strategies must incorporate cultural sensitivity, ethical accountability, and digital adaptability to succeed in the Nigerian context. It recommends integrating global PR case studies into Nigerian higher education curricula to better prepare future practitioners. The*



*study contributes to global PR scholarship by combining international theory with local perspectives, highlighting the implications for policy, practice, and education in emerging markets.*

**Keywords:** Global Public Relations, Students' Perception, Cultural Barriers, Ethical Dilemmas, UNIUYO, AKSU.

## **Introduction**

The concept of globalisation as it relates to public relations is linked to the advent of the new and other social interactional media which have disrupted the status quo of international public relations. Accordingly, public relations professionals have to come to terms with these phenomenal developments and structure their activities to harmonise with the current trends. While Falconi's (2006) estimate places the global number of public relations professionals between 2.3 million and 4.5 million, more recent data is sparse. For example, in 2024 an estimate suggests there are around 370,000 individuals working in PR agencies globally, though this likely undercounts in-house practitioners, freelancers, and those outside agencies assisting their organisations not only in building and maintaining multiple relationships at home where organisations have their headquarters, but also in constructing and keeping bridges abroad in host locations and transnational environments, especially with activist groups, global media, and international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs). Thus, globalisation has transformed public relations into a cross-border practice that requires navigating complex cultural, technological, and political terrains (Sriramesh & Štumberger, 2018). Ifigenia and Dimitrios (2018) affirm that globalisation and the rise of new technologies force public relations to engage with wider audiences across different cultures and political systems. However, while global PR has flourished in developed contexts, its adaptation to African and Nigerian realities presents unique challenges. Nigeria, with its population of over 200 million, diverse cultures, and fast-growing digital economy, provides fertile ground for examining how global PR is perceived and practised (Okoro & Nwafor, 2020). Yet, multinational corporations and global brands in Nigeria often face difficulties in aligning their PR strategies with local expectations, as demonstrated by Shell's controversies in the Niger Delta (Idemudia, 2014), MTN's regulatory disputes (Onwumechili, 2019), and the Twitter ban of 2021 (Akinfemisoye, 2022). This study focuses on the perceptions of students—the next generation of PR professionals—at UNIUYO and AKSU to understand how they interpret the challenges, issues, and implications of global PR in Nigeria.



## **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Assess students' awareness of global public relations practices.
2. Examine students' perceptions of the challenges (cultural, ethical, technological) of global PR.
3. Analyse how selected global PR case studies resonate with Nigerian students.
4. Explore the implications of students' perceptions for global PR practice in Nigeria.

## **Literature review**

### **Global PR management roles**

In general, public relations professionals can be communication managers who organise and integrate communication activities, or they can be communication technicians who primarily write and construct messages (Schmitz, 2012). Interestingly, public relations has evolved into a global practice that transcends borders, cultures, and political systems, a development which creates multiple roles for practitioners (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2020; Grunig, 1992). This development may have informed Abdullah, Fawkes, and Lee's (2023) assertion that achieving communication effectiveness in global public relations requires practitioners to develop cultural capability, ethical professionalism, and flexibility in diverse global contexts. The assertion is supported by Global Public Relations with particular emphasis on the importance of cultural sensitivity, ethical accountability, and technological adaptability in achieving communication effectiveness (Reframing a Global Public Relations Practice, 2023; Perceptions of Ethically Ambiguous Public Relations Practices, 2023), while ethical accountability and adaptability in navigating digital and contextual challenges should guide the roles of global public relations managers (Abdullah, Mohamad, Raza, & Hasan, 2023; Klyueva & Ngondo, 2023).

The literature demonstrates that while global PR strategies are often designed in Western contexts, their application in Africa requires significant adaptation due to differences in cultural values, governance structures, and technological access.

Globally, case studies illustrate how cultural adaptation enhances PR outcomes. Coca-Cola's 'Share a Coke' campaign succeeded by localising content across diverse markets (Watson, 2019). Conversely, ethical lapses undermine trust, as seen in BP's handling of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Technological change has also reshaped global PR, with digital platforms such as Twitter and Facebook becoming central to stakeholder engagement (Macnamara, 2018).



### **African/Nigerian context**

In Africa, PR practice is deeply influenced by cultural norms and political structures. Research by Sriramesh (2009) shows that African contexts often combine community-based communication with modern PR strategies. Nigerian scholarship highlights persistent challenges: Shell's controversies in Ogoniland demonstrate ethical failures (Idemudia, 2014), MTN's regulatory disputes reveal governance and compliance issues (Onwumechili, 2019), and the Twitter ban in Nigeria highlights the fragility of digital communication (Akinfemisoye, 2022). Meanwhile, advocacy campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls demonstrate the potential of grassroots mobilisation for global impact (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019). Thus, the literature underscores that global PR in Nigeria is shaped by a combination of international strategies and local realities. Students' perceptions provide valuable insight into how future practitioners interpret these dynamics, offering lessons for global brands, policymakers, and educators.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on three theories to frame its analysis. First, the Excellence Theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) argues that effective PR is characterised by two-way symmetrical communication, where organisations and stakeholders engage in mutual dialogue. Second, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001) provides a lens for understanding how cultural values such as collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance shape PR practices. As a third framework, the professional cultural competence according to Freitag (2002) in Molleda (2012) maintains that global public relations professionals would be likely to succeed in and to pursue further international assignments when acquiring adequate preparatory background or cultural competency. Inherent in these cultural competence models are initial training in cultures, political and economic aspects, foreign languages, and international assignments, among others. Together, these frameworks explain why global PR strategies succeed or fail in local contexts and provide a basis for interpreting students' perceptions.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a survey design. The population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) and Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU), estimated at 20,000. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 380 was determined at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across faculties and levels of study. Data were

collected through structured questionnaires, consisting of closed-ended Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, and analysed using descriptive statistics. Tables and figures were used to visualise key findings.

**Table 1: Uniuyo and Aksu students' perception of global P.R. challenges and case studies (N=190).**

<b>Variables/Case Studies</b>	<b>UNIUYO</b>		<b>AKSU</b>		
	NO	%	NO	%	% Mean
Cultural barriers hinder global PR effectiveness					
Agree	140	74	148	78	76
Disagree	32	17	26	14	15.5
Neutral	18	9	16	8	8.5
Total	190	100	190	100	
Technological limitations affect global PR					
Agree	128	67	119	63	65
Disagree	34	18	52	27	22.5
Neutral	28	15	22	12	13.5
Total	190	100	190	100	
Ethnical dilemmas undermine global PR credibility					
Agree	108	57	116	61	59
Disagree	54	28	52	27	27.5
Neutral	28	15	22	12	13.5
Total	190	100	190	100	
Shell's Niger Delta controversies reflect ethnical failures					
Agree	134	71	140	74	72.5
Disagree	34	18	32	17	17.5
Neutral	22	11	18	9	10
Total	190	100	190	100	
Cocacola's share a coke campaign demonstrates cultural adoption					

Agree	128	68	133	70	69
Disagree	36	19	34	18	18.5
Neutral	25	13	23	12	12.5
Total	190	100	190	100	
Twitter ban in Nigeria shows political interference					
Agree	128	67	115	61	64
Disagree	42	22	49	26	24
Neutral	20	11	26	13	12
Total	190	100	190	100	

**Source:** Field study 2025

## Discussion

Table 1 presents the perceptions of students from the University of Uyo (UNIUYO) and Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) on the challenges, issues, and implications of global public relations (PR) management. The findings underscore both similarities and subtle differences between the two institutions, reflecting their unique educational and socio-cultural contexts.

### 1. Cultural Barriers

At UNIUYO, 74% of students agreed that cultural barriers hinder global PR effectiveness, compared to 78% at AKSU. This suggests that while both populations recognise the salience of cultural factors, AKSU students—who are largely exposed to rural and community-based communication structures—are more sensitive to cultural misalignments in global PR campaigns. This aligns with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory, which posits that collectivist societies place higher value on cultural congruence in communication.

### 2. Technological Limitations

UNIUYO students (67%) were more concerned about technological barriers than their AKSU counterparts (63%). This may be attributed to their greater exposure to digital platforms and reliance on online tools for academic and social interaction, making them more critical of lapses such as the Twitter ban or limited digital infrastructure. This reflects global scholarship highlighting the centrality of digital platforms in contemporary PR (Macnamara, 2018).



### **3. Ethical Dilemmas**

Both groups acknowledged the prevalence of ethical challenges, with 57% at UNIUYO and 61% at AKSU agreeing that ethical dilemmas undermine PR credibility. The slightly higher response from AKSU students suggests a stronger awareness of community-level ethical issues, possibly influenced by corporate-community relations in Nigeria, as seen in Shell's Niger Delta controversies (Idemudia, 2014).

### **4. Case Studies**

Shell's Niger Delta crisis was widely recognised as an ethical failure (71% at UNIUYO, 74% at AKSU). This demonstrates a shared understanding of how unethical global PR practices erode trust.

Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign received strong recognition as an example of cultural adaptation, with similar approval rates across both universities (68% UNIUYO; 70% AKSU). This reinforces the literature that localisation fosters audience connection (Watson, 2019).

The Twitter ban was more strongly emphasised at UNIUYO (67%) compared to AKSU (61%), likely reflecting urban students' higher dependence on social media platforms for academic, professional, and political engagement.

### **5. Implications**

The comparative findings suggest that while both institutions share similar perceptions of global PR challenges, UNIUYO students are more digitally inclined and politically aware, whereas AKSU students are more culture- and ethics-focused. This dual perspective highlights the necessity for global PR strategies in Nigeria to balance cultural sensitivity with technological and ethical accountability.

The discussion indicates that while UNIUYO and AKSU students share common perspectives on the overarching challenges of global public relations, their distinct differences reflect Nigeria's broader urban-rural divide concerning technology access, cultural frameworks, and ethical considerations.

The findings align with global scholarship emphasising the centrality of cultural adaptation in PR (Freitag, 2002; Watson, 2019). Students' strong recognition of ethical dilemmas reflects Nigeria's historical struggles with corporate accountability in cases such as Shell in Ogoniland (Idemudia, 2014). Technological and political barriers, exemplified by the Twitter ban, illustrate the fragility of digital PR strategies in contexts where governance is unstable (Akinfemisoye, 2022). The positive reception of Coca-Cola's campaign highlights the potential of culturally adaptive PR strategies, supporting



Hofstede's framework on the importance of cultural values. Overall, students' perceptions mirror the challenges that multinational corporations encounter when operating in Nigeria. Their insights underscore the need for global PR strategies that are not only globally informed but also locally responsive.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study concludes that global PR management in Nigeria is shaped by cultural barriers, ethical dilemmas, and technological challenges. Students' perceptions emphasise the necessity of embedding cultural sensitivity, ethical responsibility, and digital adaptability in global PR practice. For policymakers, the findings suggest the need for regulatory frameworks that support open communication. For educators, integrating global case studies into Nigerian PR curricula will equip future professionals with the skills to navigate complex global-local dynamics. For practitioners, the study highlights the importance of aligning global strategies with local realities to achieve communication.

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