

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Public Relations Strategies and their Effectiveness in Dispute Resolution in Uvuawhuo Ibaa, Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigated the prevalent public relations strategies deployed to manage and resolve conflicts and how these strategies have been effective in Uvuawhuo Ibaa in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. It adopted qualitative methods comprising interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation in the data collection process. Findings reveal a hybrid model that combines indigenous dispute settlement mechanisms with contemporary public relations practices, emphasizing dialogue, mediation, and community engagement. As results show, when properly utilized, the identified public relations strategies can serve as a vital tool in fostering unity, promoting peaceful coexistence, and ensuring sustainable development in Uvuawhuo, Ibaa. The study concluded that effective public relations plays a vital role in sustaining peace and development with in rural communities, and recommends the institutionalization of these hybrid models for broader application in similar settings.

Keywords: Public Relations, Dispute Resolution, Effectiveness, Strategies, Emohua.

1. Introduction

The significance of public relations in the resolution of communal disputes cannot be overstated, as virtually every society faces crises, conflicts, or various challenges. The innate human tendencies for control, suppression, and dominance foster hostility, and may lead to the deterioration of social systems. The diversity and complexity of the human species, coupled with differing perspectives and opinions, are substantial factors contributing to disputes. As humans reside within communities, the pursuit of recognition is inevitable; the survival instinct ensures that conflicts and disputes are unavoidable. When such conflicts arise within communities, organizations, or other settings, they can often be mitigated through effective public relations. Public relations guides management on optimal policy decisions and actions, facilitates the implementation of programs, and promotes peace within conflict-ridden communities and societies. Its purpose is to foster public understanding of

appropriate conduct and regulations within society and organizations, thereby aiding in the achievement of established goals (Mwanyimwagiru, 2019).

Public relations involve professionals using the most diplomatic means to resolve misunderstandings, conflicts, and perceived insecurities that may arise from communal disputes, war, and other social issues. Public relations promotes mutual understanding between communities, organizations, and their various publics. It also serves as a persuasive communication tool used to influence public opinion or attitudes in a positive direction, fostering understanding and acceptance. It establishes a two-way communication to ensure mutual understanding and resolution of conflicts of interest between organizations and their publics. Various methods were used by the Emohua people to maintain peace among communities, such as opinion leaders, the “offor” holders, and other traditional leaders, especially before the arrival of the Europeans and subsequent colonization.

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Public relations as practiced today in Nigeria, was introduced by Britain through the vehicle of colonialism. Being an adjunct of journalism, public relations became an important element in public communication in the colonial days. The pioneers were already enjoying the patronage of the people and those in government. The government felt the need for another branch of communication which would convey subtly its feelings to the people without really going through the rigors of mental composition of communicative acts. During the Second World War (1940), the government's urge for more channels of communication became more pronounced, especially the need to present and analyze information about the war. This eventually led the government to establish an office of information. It is worth noting that public relations, as simply understood by the general public, is all about creating a good image of the government, organization or individuals.

Peace is simply a state of mutual harmony between people or groups, especially in personal relationships. Gandhi once said, "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." Every person on earth must take responsibility for their lives and contribute to building a 'world of peace' where people of different cultures can coexist peacefully. It is therefore essential that the human spirit be transformed and cultivated towards a culture of non-violence. Respect for everyone's way of life is the foundation for universal harmony. Thus, the prerequisite for national, regional, or global peace is for people to truly learn about each other, understand, and appreciate each other's cultures and traditions (Gangopadhyay, 2010a; Ukpere, Michael & Ajoku, 2012).

Chieftaincy tussle was one of the major causes of the crisis in Uvuawhuo-Ibaa Community in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. According to Dahrendorf (1973) unequal distribution of power or authority, resources is central to the generation of disputes in society. There is no gainsaying that Emohua is one of the prominent local governments within the Ikwerre extraction because of perhaps, its location. Etymologically chieftaincy tussle started after the death of His Royal Majesty Eze Ohaka in 2008 which left the seat vacant and as well induced various interests to contest on who assumes the position of the "Nynweli" stool (paramount ruler). The struggle for this traditional stool resulted in violent conflict, including the use of "Area Boys" to harass opponents in order to emerge winner in the contest. There were

basically, three major contenders namely, Chief Sampson Ovua, Chief Jona Wobodo, and one of the sons of the late Majesty, Chief Ohaka. Each of the various blocks in the community started parading themselves as the Royal Majesty-elect. This attitude aggravated much anger among community members and in order to maintain safety and security around themselves the contestants engaged armed boys which metamorphosed to cult groups in the community. These cult groups existed as *Deegbam*, *Deewelland* and *Icelanders*. They became elements that perpetrated crime and crisis in the community.

The emerging crises claimed lives, and many atrocities were committed. Development was stalled. Daylight gang raping became the order of the day; killing of residents by the members of cult groups were no longer news. Sometimes, the people were attacked in their houses, churches, farms, bus stops etc.; therefore, the need to resolve these problems in the Uvuawhuo community through public relations becomes imperative.

The community could no longer hold its ground and address the problem of chieftaincy that had already done much damage, hence the community invited different stakeholders, such as a social/political organization in Ikwerre land called "Ogbakolkwerre" which is the gathering of Ikwerre people, opinion leaders, clergymen, "offor" holders, among others, to address this problem of chieftaincy tussle.

Public relations in communal dispute resolution is a problem-solving communication that is expected to create the necessary awareness and enlightenment of the residents and awaken them to what is needed of them in a civil society. What role did the application of public relations play in the resolution of the dispute and subsequent restoration of peace to the troubled community? This study aims to ascertain how public relations was applied in resolving this chieftaincy dispute in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the public relations strategies/techniques used in resolving disputes among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in the Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State?

2. How effective are the PR strategies/techniques in resolving the dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in the Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State?

3. Literature Review

3.1 PR Practice in Traditional African Society

The application of PR techniques is not a new concept on the African continent. It dates back to the beginning of the African Civilization. According to Narty in Ransburg (2002), the concept of PR was practiced in Africa before the era of colonialism. Narty further explains how the task of a spokesman at the chief's seat of power in traditional villages is very similar to that of a PR practitioner. According to tradition, no Africa chief spoke directly to a visitor who called at the chief seat of power. All interactions and communications with the chief were channeled through a spokesman. These spokesmen were well versed in the customs and traditional practices of the village. Such individual assumed eminent positions and were highly respected by the people. This, incidentally, is still the case in some remote and traditional rural areas in Africa. PR is therefore not a foreign concept in the African context, but rather has been practiced in different formant and deeply rooted in the African culture Ransburg (2000).

Traditionally an African Chiefs or elders in the village do not speak to a visitor who calls the chief's palace. All interaction and communication were channeled through the spokesman, who might be a linguist, or an interpreter. These nominals are known to be well versed in the option and traditional practices of the village and highly respected by the people. In many African countries the families of these nominal are honored by passing this position on from generation to generation. This practice is what is today's public relations. The philosophy behind this is to ensure that the skills of communications are passed on easily and whole heartedly. PR has been present for a long time as captured in Narty (1988). African Marital affairs are another example where the concept of PR was found. During the initial stages and through the negotiations of the marriage contract a mediator plays a crucial role in the success of the union.

Other sophisticated forms of public relations is epitomized in traditional music and dancing. Drums convey messages that may anomie an important event in the day-to-day activities of the people in the village. It may be an accident or tiding of a joyful occasion.

3.2 Communication in Conflict Management

Public relations can effectively function and be used as a medium for communal dispute resolution only if appropriate messages are delivered through good communication. In explaining further, PR experts have used communication to bring the much-needed peace within the environs where it was applied with the intention to bring a desirable change especially during crises and disputes. The place of communication, which is the base of any interaction, cannot be overemphasized, as many scholars have given different definitions of the concept.

Sannie (2000) defines communication as "a relationship, an interaction, and the process by which messages (codes) are transferred from a source to the receiver". This presupposes that communication is a means of establishing a relationship or interaction to make something known by means of understood symbols between people or groups that have something in common with each other. It is not enough to communicate; the purpose and intention of the communication must unveil its mission to achieve the intended objectives.

Agarwal and Gray (2012), opined that communication is about the exchange of information, thought and emotion between individuals or groups. On the contrary, Scannell and Rickenbacher (2010) opined that communication can both cause and remedy. In the case of dispute resolution, communication is used in a positive dimension for peace and tranquility.

Communication is a social feature of interactions. It is a social interaction between two or more people to exchange ideas, messages, opinions, or information. Information is a very vital element in communication because it provides the required facts and figures that make meaningful communication possible. Communication can be viewed from two perspectives: traditional and modern angles. Traditional communication is the beliefs, system, opinions, actions, culture, and customs that are local to the given society. It is this belief that the public relations act to bring a desirable and peaceful settlement. According to Ochonogor (2010) "traditional communities have their in-built communication system which is verbal, face-to-face, expressed through gestures and symbols, codified and decoded by those sharing the same culture". He expatriated further that cultural communication involves various levels of communication within the village structure and in a cluster of villages that are inter-linked and inter-

connected by various kinships, political, and socio-economic obligations. Traditional communication also involves several forms of non-verbal communication through which important messages are conveyed within the society using objects, acts, and symbols. The significant use of public relations, particularly interpersonal communication, has made the people to look their perceived opponent eyeball to eyeball for conducive and mutual relationship.

Modern communication, on the other hand, is the use of electronic gadgets in communication. Today mobiles and smartphones have almost replaced the traditional forms of communication. With the coming of the internet, everybody now communicates freely to each other. Today the world depends on virtual modes of communication, which inadvertently has made the world a global village. Modern communication platforms such as instant message apps, social media, video chat, live chat, voice calling, blogging, e-mail among others have made it very easy for people to stay in touch with their near and dear ones without being physically present. This modern form of communication has actually helped to transient messages of peace in place of disputes and conflicts, particularly video calls. Public relations have leveraged on this to make their more ease.

Omego and Nwachukwu (2013) opined that communication is basically the passing of information, feelings and emotions from one person to another. Communication is also seen as the exchange of information and the transmission of meaning (Byrne & Lemay 2002).

According to Nwabueze (2004), the communication process today particularly, interpersonal communication which often is used by the public relations professionals has ensured society's survival and growth and is also the medium through which social activities and civilization are expressed. In fact, we communicate to live and live to communicate. He opines further that communication is everyday activity involving the transfer, transmission and sharing of ideas, experience, information and data of all kinds between a sender and receiver. It is the exchange or sharing of meanings, messages, opinions and facts of all kinds between two entities or within a person. Baran (2004) sees communication as the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver. It is a process that involves the sharing of meaning between a sender and receiver within a common frame of reference.

Communication can take place either through intrapersonal or interpersonal. Intrapersonal communication is defined as communication that takes place within one person, that is, it is that type of communication which is conceived within and by the person alone before it is relayed out while interpersonal communication is the one between two or more people. Communication takes place when meaning has been communicated. Communication plays a crucial role in curbing disputes and bringing lasting solutions. Consciously it involves sharing ideas, feelings, thoughts, and others that humans share. It is an inseparable, essential and continuous process just like the circulatory system in the human body.

Ojomo (2004) defined communication as the process of sharing ideas, feelings, thoughts and messages with others. When two or more people are in the same place and are aware of each other being there, then communication is said to be taking place, no matter how subtle or inadvertent it may be, even without vocalizations, an onlooker may be using prompts of stance (posture), facial manifestation, and garb to impact other's role, poignant situation, persona or intents. Communication in its simplest sense involves two or more people who come together to share, dialogue and to commune, or just to be together for a festival or family gathering (Shahzalal & Hassan 2019). He further defined it as an exchange of thought or idea. Two common elements in every communication exchange are the sender and the receiver. The sender initiates communication. In a school, the sender is a person who has a need or desire to convey an idea or concept to others. The receiver is the individual to whom the message is sent. The sender encodes the idea by selecting words, symbols, or gestures with which to compose a message. The message is the outcome of the encoding, which takes the form of verbal, nonverbal, or written language. The message is sent through a medium or channel, which is the carrier of communication. The medium can be a face-to-face conversation, telephone call, e-mail, or written report which are all available for public relations experts who engender peaceful resolution between and among warring parties.

Poor communication, or the absence of it about subjects, or a misinterpretation or ill-feelings of one another by conflicting parties, can easily lead to the escalation of conflict. The role of communication in conflict prevention and crisis management cannot

be underscored, as most conflicts and disputes have to do with perceptions, assumptions, stereotypes, and attitudes that have been developed over time. Communication is a non-adversarial, cheap method of preventing and removing conflict situations quite within the grip of the parties. Once communication is lost, parties risk getting into a deeper crisis that may not be easily resolved.

3.3 Theoretical Foundations

Two theories are foundational in the proper examination of the discourse of this research. They are:

3.4 The Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory is also considered relevant for this study. An American initiative in the late forties brought forth the social responsibility theory. Realizing that the market had failed to fulfill the promise that press freedom would reveal the truth, the Commission on Freedom of the Press provided a model in which the media had certain obligations to the society. These obligations were expressed in words of informative, truthful, accurate, objective, and balanced. Siebert writes that the goal of the social responsibility system is that media as a whole is pluralized, indicating a reflection of the diversity of society as well as access to various points of view. Its tenets include:

1. Providing a forum for discussions, information and debate on the public affairs.
2. Instructing and informing the public to make it capable of self-government.
3. Remaining independent of outside pressure by maintaining its own economic self-sufficiency among others.

The theory is apt for this study in the sense that public relations is all about dissemination of information aimed to foster mutual understanding and relationship between and among members of a given organizations, community and the general public. Going by Simpson's (2014) stand point about the goal of this model, it implies that public relations activities in the organizations, community where it operates requires continuous interaction with the public through designated communication channels.

3.5 Two-way Symmetric Model

The two-way symmetric model was developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1992 to ethically espouse on what

public relations management is and does, which are communication, dialogue, feedback establishment and maintenance of mutual understanding and harmonious relationship between an organization and its publics (Tench & Yeomans 2014).

This model sees public relations practitioners as communicators, mediators, and persuaders. As communicators, they ensure that they relate with their various publics and strive to always maintain mutual relationship between an organization, community and its public. It is also the duty of the public relations practitioners to mediate crisis and dispute situations by presenting the public interest favorably or in a good light before the organization and making sure that they persuade stakeholders in the dispute, and its public to embrace dialogue which is capable of resulting in a change (Sledizik 2008). Sampson (2014) stresses that the main goals of the two-way symmetric model are negotiation, dispute resolution, and the establishment of mutual understanding and respect between an organization and its public. The ideal of maintaining this level of relationship is hinged on the fact that without mutual understanding existing between organizations and the public, there would be misunderstanding, crisis or dispute.

The relevance of the model to this study is based on the fact that public relations exploits communication in a way that would make meaning to members of the community and parties involved, thereby, establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between and among members of the community.

4. Methodology

For this research, the descriptive survey research design was adopted. Nwafor (2019) opined that the descriptive survey design is concerned with the gathering of data to describe and interpret an existing state of affair, trend, practice, attitude, and an ongoing process. Obong, et al. (2015) state that events, phenomena in descriptive surveys are described the way they are. In fact, information is collected without any manipulation.

The population of the study consists of 8201 young and adult male and female citizens of Uvuawhuo-Ibaa community, comprising of three main groups, namely, Mgbuosimini, Omusunu, Mgbuisinu, respectively of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. This figure was obtained on March 18, 2023, from the Emohua Local Government Council Office of the National Population Commission.

The above communities were selected based on the prevalence of cult activities and chieftaincy disputes among the people. The figure covered the youths, CDC, chiefs, opinion leaders and other stakeholders in Uvuawhuo – Ibaa, Emohua Local Government Area, who fall within the age bracket of 14 to 69 years.

There are 12 villages that make up the Uvuawhuo – Ibaa Communities. For the purpose of adequate representation of the population, Krejci and Morgan population and sample size table determination was used to determine sample size of the study. Therefore, the sample size of this study is 327 respondents. A purposive sampling method was used to select the 327 respondents from the 20 villages that made up Uvuawhuo-Ibaa in Emouha Local Government Area of Rivers State. According to Baridam (2001), a nonprobability method is applied when the selection of the items in the sample is based on the judgment of the researcher rather than on randomness. The purposive/ judgmental sampling method used by the researchers is rather discretionary as the researchers intentionally selected his sampling unit based on their knowledge of the target population. In each of the villages, 16 copies of the questionnaire were administered. The study also used FGD in addition to an interview guide, which enabled the researcher to elicit more information on the subject matter. A total of 327 copies of questionnaires were administered, while 320 copies were retrieved and used in the study.

An expert in Measurement and Evaluation ascertained the face and content validity of the instruments. The expert reviewed and securitized the items of the instruments, especially in terms of their clarity, relevance, quality, and appropriateness, and made corrections and comments that formed the basis for the amendments and authentication of the final printout.

To adequately establish the reliability of the “Public Relations and Communal Dispute Resolutions Questionnaire”, the test-retest method was adopted. First, the questionnaire was administered to 10 selected respondents. After a two-week interval, the questionnaire was retrieved and re-administered to the same 10 respondents, and their scores, the first and second test were recorded and analyzed using the Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation. Thus, the reliability coefficient obtained for the questionnaire was 0.96.

The study utilized questionnaire titled: “Public Relations and Communal Dispute Resolution

Questionnaire” (PRACDRQ) as the instrument for data collection. According to Ebong et al., (2015), questionnaire is carefully constructed or designed to elicit useful information for the eventual analysis of the data. In this regard, the questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data from the respondents, and it consisted of sections A and B. Section A centered on demographic variables of the respondents. Section B centered on the use of public relations in communal dispute resolution in Uvuawhuo Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State which contain 25 items designed on a Four-points Likert Scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) with 4 points, Agreed (A) with 3 points, Strongly Disagreed (SD) with 2 points and Disagreed (D) with 1 point respectively which is presented in tables.

An interview guide was also used by the researcher to obtain oral responses from the interviewees (chiefs, opinion leaders, members of cult groups, none cult members, members of CDC, etc.) on issues of Public Relations in resolving cult group activities and chieftaincy disputes in Uvuawhuo. The interview guide contained five structured questions with a focus on the objectives and research question of the study. According to Kakwandu (2015), an interview is popularly used in gathering qualitative data.

Data collected for the research questions was analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation, as well as Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation (Multiple Correlation). The Mean and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions. The mean cut-off score was set as 2.50 ($4+3+2+1/4$); hence, items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were marked as agreed, while those with mean scores below 2.50 were marked as disagree. Thus, decisions were made on the basis below:

- (i) A statement is accepted if the calculated mean (weighted average) is > 2.5
- (ii) A statement was rejected if the calculated mean (weighted average) is < 2.5

5. Results and Discussion

A total of 327 copies of the questionnaire were administered in the 12 villages that make up Uvuawhuo community; 320 copies were successfully retrieved, which constitutes 99 percent retrieval rate of the total copies of the questionnaire. Table 1 presents the demographic variables of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	180	55
	Female	147	45
Age	Below 20	33	10
	21-30	131	40
	31-40	82	25
	41-50	49	15
	51 and above	33	10
Occupation	Student	98	30
	Civil Servant	65	20
	Trader	82	25
	Farmer	49	15
	Others (specify)	33	10
Years residing in Uvuawhuo	Less than 5 years	65	20
	6-10 years	82	25
	11-20 years	98	30
	Above 20 years	82	25
Educational Level	No formal education	33	10
	Primary education	65	20
	Secondary education	131	40
	Tertiary education	98	30

5.1 Research Question one

What are the Public Relations strategies/techniques used in resolving dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2 presents the mean distribution of the public relations strategies/techniques used in resolving dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 2. Mean Distribution of the Public Relations strategies/techniques used in resolving dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State.

	ITEMS	S A	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
11	Public Relations campaigns employed dialogue as a major strategy for resolving the disputes.	91 364	131 393	34 68	71 71	896	2.7	Agree
12	The use of conflict mediation techniques by public relations officers helped in resolving the chieftaincy conflicts.	66 264	91 273	120 240	50 50	827	2.5	Agree
13	Sensitization and awareness programs were effective public relations strategies used during the conflicts.	69 276	84 252	127 254	47 47	829	2.5	Agree
14	Public Relations strategies involving the use of community influencers helped in resolving the cult group clashes.	76 304	32 96	120 240	99 99	739	2.2	Disagree
15	Public Relations employed reconciliation techniques that were accepted by both chieftaincy contenders and cult groups.	26 104	142 426	109 218	50 50	798	2.4	Disagree

The data indicates that dialogue was a prominent and effective PR strategy. Conflict mediation techniques and awareness programs were also rated as moderately effective. However, involving community influencers and using reconciliation techniques were seen as less successful, highlighting some challenges in PR's conflict resolution approaches.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) provided valuable insights into the public relations (PR) strategies and techniques used in addressing disputes among cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in the Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. The analysis of participants' contributions revealed a mixture of successes and challenges in the

application of these strategies, emphasizing the need for a nuanced and context-specific approach to PR in conflict resolution. Key sub-themes from the FGD are presented below:

5.2 Dialogue as a Key PR Strategy

A recurring theme in the discussions was the role of dialogue as a central PR strategy in resolving disputes. Chiefs in the FGD emphasized that mediated discussions between conflicting parties fostered understanding and reduced animosity. These dialogues often took place in neutral spaces, such as community halls or religious institutions, ensuring that all voices were heard. Non-cultist youths echoed this sentiment, stressing that dialogue created opportunities for parties to clarify grievances and work towards a consensus. This aligns with the assertion by Onuoha (2019) that dialogue is a cornerstone of conflict resolution, as it enables conflicting parties to engage constructively.

However, cultist youths expressed skepticism about the neutrality of these discussions, highlighting instances where mediators allegedly displayed bias toward one faction. Such perceptions underscore the importance of impartiality in PR-mediated dialogue processes. According to Okonkwo and Eze (2020), perceived bias in conflict mediation can erode trust, rendering the process less effective. Thus, while dialogue proved to be a valuable strategy, its success depended on the integrity and perceived neutrality of the mediators involved.

5.3 Awareness Campaigns and Sensitization Programs

The FGDs revealed that PR practitioners utilized awareness campaigns to educate community members about the importance of peaceful coexistence. Chiefs noted that these campaigns, often conducted through public announcements, posters, and town hall meetings, aimed to address misconceptions fueling the conflicts. Non-cultist youths highlighted the value of these programs in reshaping community narratives, particularly in challenging stereotypes associated with cult groups and fostering a more inclusive atmosphere.

Cultist youths, however, criticized the campaigns as superficial, arguing that they failed to address the systemic issues underlying the conflicts, such as poverty and lack of opportunities. This criticism aligns with the argument by Nwankwo (2021) that awareness campaigns must be paired with practical

interventions to address the root causes of disputes. For PR strategies to achieve long-term success, they must transcend awareness creation and actively promote tangible conflict resolution mechanisms.

5.4 Conflict Mediation Techniques

Conflict mediation techniques were another key PR strategy discussed during the FGDs. Chiefs described mediation as a structured process where neutral third parties facilitated negotiations between disputing groups. Non-cultist youths noted that mediation often involved respected elders or external PR professionals, whose involvement lent credibility to the process. Such approaches align with the findings of Adebayo (2018), who emphasized that skilled mediators could de-escalate tensions and guide conflicting parties toward mutually beneficial agreements.

However, cultist youths expressed dissatisfaction with mediation efforts, citing a lack of follow-through in implementing agreements reached during mediation sessions. They argued that unresolved grievances often resurfaced, reigniting tensions. This finding highlights the need for post-mediation monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, as suggested by Okafor(2020), to ensure the sustainability of agreements reached during mediation processes.

5.5 Grassroots Mobilization

Grassroots mobilization emerged as an effective PR strategy, particularly in engaging marginalized groups and fostering community-wide participation in peacebuilding efforts. Non-cultist youths praised this approach for its inclusivity, noting that mobilizing local influencers and community members created a sense of ownership over the conflict resolution process. Chiefs agreed, adding that grassroots initiatives strengthened communal bonds and facilitated collective action.

However, cultist youths highlighted a gap in the inclusivity of grassroots mobilization efforts, arguing that certain factions were excluded from these initiatives. This exclusion, they suggested, perpetuated feelings of alienation and distrust. Scholars such as Eze and Akinola (2020) have emphasized the importance of inclusivity in grassroots mobilization, arguing that its success hinges on the active involvement of all stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups.

5.6 Challenges in Reconciliation Techniques

Reconciliation techniques employed by PR practitioners were met with mixed reviews during the FGDs. Chiefs and non-cultist youths acknowledged efforts to foster reconciliation through traditional ceremonies and

symbolic gestures, such as joint celebrations or shared meals. However, cultist youths viewed these techniques as performative, arguing that they failed to address deeper divides within the community. This finding is consistent with the observations of Agbo (2019), who noted that reconciliation efforts must be underpinned by genuine efforts to address structural inequalities and historical grievances.

The researchers in other to garner more responses during the focus group discussion/interview session, raised another question, which is: what other strategies/techniques should be adopted to resolve chieftaincy tussle and cult groups activities in the community? The responses of the interviewees show that there was need to involve extra measures when the dispute is at extreme. Some of the chiefs were of the opinion that the wrath of the gods of the land should be invoked to serve as a deterrent to mischief markers. They argued that each community all over the world has the methodsof sharing traditional stools to their indigenes, but blamed the issue of chieftaincy

tussle and cult activities to greed and unholy political connections, which they posit that when the gods are involved some troublemakers may be compelled to have a rethink. Though this position was shared by many, the law-abiding youthsopined that sincerity on the part of their community leaders/government should be a benchmark for dispute resolution. They also suggested equal distribution of community amenities, none inclusion of the police among others as measures for a peaceful dispute resolution.

5.7 Research Question Two

How effective are the PR strategies/techniques in resolving the dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Table 3 presents the mean distribution of the effectiveness of the PR strategies/techniques in resolving the dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 3. Mean distribution of the effectiveness of the PR strategies/techniques in resolving the dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State

	ITEMS	S A	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Remark
16	Public Relations techniques were effective in preventing further escalation of the chieftaincy disputes.	58 232	149 447	73 146	47 47	872	2.7	Agree
17	The strategies used by Public Relations professionals helped to achieve lasting peace among the cult groups.	44 176	89 267	83 166	111 111	720	2.2	Disagree
18	Public Relations strategies ensured that both parties were satisfied with the dispute resolution process.	69 276	38 114	122 244	98 98	732	2.2	Disagree
19	The use of Public Relations techniques resulted in a reduction of tension within the community.	21 84	89 267	140 280	77 77	708	2.1	Disagree
20	Public Relations interventions have contributed to maintaining peace in the Uvuawhuo community post-conflict.	63 252	116 348	37 74	111 111	785	2.4	Disagree

The effectiveness of PR strategies in preventing further escalation of chieftaincy disputes received an agreeable score. However, the ability to ensure lasting peace among cult groups was rated lower. Likewise, PR strategies aimed at satisfying both parties and reducing community tension were not perceived as highly effective. Although PR interventions helped maintain some post-conflict peace, the overall sentiment indicates dissatisfaction with the long-term impact.

The effectiveness of public relations (PR) strategies and techniques in resolving disputes among cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community was a key focus during the conducted focus group discussions (FGDs). Insights from chiefs,

non-cultist youths, and cultist youths revealed different perceptions of how effective these approaches are, highlighting both their successes and limitations. The main roles of PR identified in the FGD are outlined and discussed below:

5.8 Prevention of Escalation in Chieftaincy Disputes

The FGD participants largely agreed that PR strategies were moderately effective in preventing further escalation of chieftaincy disputes. Chiefs emphasized that structured dialogue, mediated by respected figures in the community, succeeded in curbing tensions. Such efforts helped create an environment where grievances could be aired without resorting to violence. Non-cultist youths affirmed the importance

of these strategies in creating temporary stability, emphasizing that the inclusion of community leaders fostered credibility. This finding is consistent with Onuoha (2019), who asserts that PR techniques emphasizing preventive measures often yield immediate benefits in conflict management.

However, cultist youths expressed skepticism regarding the sustainability of these preventive measures, arguing that while PR efforts temporarily halted overt conflicts, they failed to address underlying tensions. The perception of unresolved grievances suggests that PR strategies must incorporate mechanisms for long-term conflict management, as supported by Okafor (2020), who emphasizes the importance of post-resolution monitoring to ensure lasting peace.

5.9 Limited Success in Ensuring Lasting Peace Among Cult Groups

A notable finding from the FGD was the limited success of PR strategies in achieving lasting peace among cult groups. Cultist youths criticized the superficiality of many interventions, highlighting that the strategies often overlooked deeper socioeconomic issues fueling the conflicts. They argued that PR campaigns focused more on symptom management than on addressing systemic challenges such as unemployment and lack of opportunities. This aligns with Nwankwo (2021), who notes that PR strategies often falter when they fail to integrate socioeconomic development into their peacebuilding frameworks.

Chiefs and non-cultist youths also acknowledged the limitations of PR efforts in ensuring long-term harmony, particularly among cult groups. They noted that the transient nature of many interventions left room for conflicts to resurface. This finding underscores the need for PR strategies to evolve beyond immediate conflict resolution, incorporating sustainable solutions tailored to the unique needs of the affected groups.

5.10 Challenges in Satisfying Both Parties and Reducing Tensions

The FGD revealed mixed opinions regarding the effectiveness of PR techniques in satisfying conflicting parties and reducing community tensions. Chiefs and non-cultist youths highlighted the difficulty of crafting resolutions that equally addressed the interests of all stakeholders. This complexity often led to dissatisfaction among one or more parties, as noted by cultist youths who felt marginalized during resolution processes. The perception of bias or

exclusion significantly undermines the efficacy of PR strategies, as observed by Okonkwo and Eze (2020), who emphasized the critical role of inclusivity in peacebuilding efforts.

Furthermore, participants pointed out that while PR campaigns successfully reduced immediate tensions, their inability to sustain this calm often resulted in a recurrence of hostilities. This highlights the importance of reinforcing PR efforts with consistent follow-up initiatives, as argued by Adebayo (2018), who stresses the need for ongoing engagement in post-conflict contexts to maintain stability.

5.11 Contributions to Post-Conflict Peace

Despite the challenges, the FGDs underscored some successes in PR's contribution to post-conflict peace. Chiefs noted that PR interventions, particularly those involving grassroots mobilization and community education, helped create a foundation for peaceful coexistence. Non-cultist youths emphasized the role of public awareness campaigns in reshaping narratives and promoting reconciliation. However, cultist youths remained critical, arguing that these efforts were insufficiently transformative.

This finding suggests that while PR strategies can play a significant role in fostering initial reconciliation, their effectiveness in maintaining long-term peace requires deeper engagement with systemic issues. As Agbo (2019) observes, sustainable peace-building requires an integrated approach that combines PR techniques with development-oriented initiatives. In a bid to elicit more information, the researchers posed a similar question to the interviewee. The question was. Do you think the PR strategies/techniques used in resolving dispute among the cult groups and chieftaincy contenders in Uvuawhuo community was effective? The responses proved generally those public relations strategies/ techniques were apt and can even be used to resolve any type of dispute. However, the youth, both the cult and none cult members disagreed on any perfect strategy for conflict resolution when the bone of contention is not holistically and sincerely tackled. This also lends credence to the position of Agbo (2019). They also agreed on the need to gradually build a stronger interpersonal relationship through communication. Their position aligns with Nwabueze (2004), which asserts that communication, particularly, interpersonal communication is key to society's survival and growth, and a recognized medium through which social activities and civilization are expressed.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the PR strategies and their effectiveness in resolving communal disputes in Uvuawhuo community, Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that the PR strategies deployed played a moderate role in raising awareness and facilitating dialogue, particularly during the chieftaincy tussle between 2008 and 2009. However, its effectiveness in mediating the chieftaincy disputes, promoting unity, and achieving long-term peace was limited, as respondents largely expressed dissatisfaction with these efforts. Despite some positive outcomes, the overall sentiment indicates need for improved strategies and more effective engagement in resolving communal disputes through PR. Grassroots mobilization emerged as a promising approach, underscoring the importance of bottom-up strategies in achieving more sustainable conflict resolution in the community.

6.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

PR practitioners should enhance their mediation efforts by engaging more with local stakeholders and developing tailored strategies for promoting unity in chieftaincy disputes. Increased collaboration with conflict resolution experts can also help in improving the overall effectiveness of PR interventions. Dialogue and awareness programs should remain core strategies, but PR practitioners should refine the use of community influencers and reconciliation techniques by training and involving respected local figures who hold sway over public opinion.

To achieve lasting peace, PR strategies should include continuous post-conflict engagement to monitor tensions and sustain dialogue among previously warring parties. PR campaigns should prioritize grassroots mobilization and community-driven approaches, given their effectiveness. Government agencies should be more meaningfully involved in local conflict resolution, with a focus on building trust and cooperation between authorities and community members.

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