

Review

Public Relations Best Practices for Faith-Based Organisations in Nigeria

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This paper aims to explore and analyze the best practices for public relations in faith-based organizations in Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research approach that involved a comprehensive literature review and the personal experience of the researcher. The findings of the study indicate that effective communication channels, a media plan, relationships with media, transparency and accountability, prompt responses to inquiries, positive relationships with members, promoting the organization's mission and values, and participating in community events are crucial for promoting a positive public image and advancing the mission of faith-based organizations in Nigeria. The results of this study provide valuable insights and recommendations for faith-based organizations in Nigeria to improve their public relations efforts and reach more people.

Keywords: Best practices, Faith-based, Nigeria Organisation, and Public relations,

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INTRODUCTION

Public relations (PR) is an important part of every company, but it is especially important for faith-based organizations in Nigeria since they operate in a unique and complex environment. These groups confront problems such as social and cultural diversity, limited resources, and rivalry with other faith-based organizations. Effective public relations methods can assist these organizations in overcoming these problems, developing a solid reputation, and connecting with their stakeholders.

The role of public relations in faith-based organizations has received a lot of attention in the literature. For example, Kim et al. (2015) stated that public relations plays an important role in shaping religious organizations' image and reputation, whereas Jackson (2017) underlined the importance of public relations in building trust and credibility among stakeholders. Furthermore, Adeyemo (2020) emphasized the importance of faith-

based organizations implementing optimal PR techniques to increase their exposure, reputation, and impact in the community.

Islamic-based organizations over the years have contributed tremendously towards the propagation of Islam in the country and the protection of the rights of Muslims. However, there is hardly a major concerted effort to ensure high-level media awareness and engagement. This has partly hindered the growth and expansion of some of the Islamic-based organizations in the country. The paper is not arguing that Islamic-based organizations have not been doing public relations but compared to other faith-based organizations, they have to do more. That is why this paper is advocating for research on understanding the adoption of public relations among faith-based organizations. This paper, even though conceptual, is geared towards providing the basis for discussion on the importance of public relations among faith-based organizations. This will go a long way in assisting Islamic organizations to create awareness

amongst their officials on the importance of public relations and the value of media visibility.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the best practices of public relations in faith-based organizations in Nigeria and their impact on organizational success. The article will present an overview of the literature on public relations in faith-based organizations, examine the current public relations strategies utilized by faith-based organizations in Nigeria, and suggest the best practices for faith-based organizations in Nigeria. The study will add to the body of information on public relations in faith-based organizations and provide practical recommendations for faith-based organizations in Nigeria to enhance their public relations strategies.

Defining Public Relations

The term public relations is relative in the sense that virtually everybody knows the word but doesn't understand the concept. Public relations just like many social science fields have multi-dimensional delineation. Defining it depends on the background and experience of the person defining it. It's hard to come by a harmonized definition of Public Relations as each practitioner has a slightly different definition. "Even people who practice public relations don't all agree on just what public relations is" (Haynes & Newsom, 2008, p. 3).

Efforts have been made to harmonize the definition of public relations. We will probe some of these definitions here to help us understand what public relations is. Frank Jefkins used the communication benchmark as the approach to understanding public relations when he defined public relations as "consists of all forms of planned communication both inward and outward between an organization and its publics to achieve objectives concerning mutual understanding." The objective of public relations according to this definition is to effectively utilize a two-way communication approach to establish mutuality between an organization and its publics. This definition emphasized more on *two-way Symmetrical approach* rather than the *Two-Way Asymmetrical approach*. That is as Da'i, your da'wa should be one-way traffic. It should be two ways, where the audience can listen, engage and interact with the Da'i.

Another definition that is more detailed and encompassing is the one expressed in 1978 in Mexico City during the First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations and the First World Forum of Public Relations. The Mexican statement not only captured what public relations entails but also validates the multidisciplinary nature of public relations.

It said, "Public Relations practice is the art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizations leaders and implementing

planned programmes of action which will serve both the organizations and public interest". This definition encapsulates the components of public relations in a more detailed and concise way. Some salient points in the definition will be analysed to have a lucid understanding of the definition and grasp the genuineness exhibited in it.

Art and Science: Public relations here is regarded as both art and science. It is an art because public relations practice needs creativity and artistic fluidity. It takes a high sense of craft and genuine creativity to draft messages that will communicate to the targeted publics. The ability to use catchy words, visual images that convey information, and thought-provoking catchphrases borne of creativity. The art aspect of public relations is sine qua non to oratory skill needed in public speaking and anchoring public events. As Da'is, public speaking is one important skill one should be acquainted with. Understanding public relations will allow us to be able to read the audience, understand how to get across to them, measure the audience's perception and design appropriate ways to reach them. Copywriting i.e. press releases, news releases, articles, opinions, rejoinders, columns, etc. are a few artworks works in the public relations field. The art of public relations is also showcased in the production of newsletters, circulars, and all forms of in-house publications.

While as a science, public relations practice the use of the scientific method in the implementation of action and to study the origin of public relations problems. They adopt the social science method in public relations necessitating the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry to investigate problems and proffer solutions. Da'is can survey the behaviour and behaviour of the audience about their environment before deciding on what topic to discuss with them, what channel of communication to reach them, and how to evaluate the impact of the message on them. All these require scientific exercise. Survey and content analysis are quite instrumental in this regard. Content analysis is used to monitor media content, and analyze the media content to make rational deductions while the survey could be used to evaluate the audience regarding any public relations activities. Research in public relations is a scientific endeavour.

Analyzing trends: In a bid to achieve its objectives of creating mutuality, public relations often analyze the trends of events as they occurred. Analysing trend entails studying Da'is' decisions and proclamations and their implication on the reputation of the organization. Quantitative and qualitative scientific methods such as survey and content analysis can be adopted to arrive at data or scientifically proven suggestions. Also, monitoring public opinions and the media is vital.

Predicting their consequences: the public relations practice predicts the consequence of the action and inaction of an organization. Public relations predict from the point of knowledge and conviction. After thorough study and analysis of trends using the scientific method of inquiry, public relations unearth prospects and challenges and forecast their implication on the organization. Since the objective of public relations is to create mutuality, the inquiry, therefore, focused on the direction of the trend whether positive or negative. If positive, the public relations sustain it, and if negative, proffers a solution.

Counselling organizations: After analysis and prediction, public relations don't stop there. It goes to the level of suggesting, advising, and warning the organization of the consequence of their actions and the needed steps to be taken. Haynes and Newsom (2008, p. 3) affirm that the three functions of analyzing, predicting, and counselling are within the "management context, in which personnel helps to frame, implement, adjust and communicate the policies that govern how an institution interacts with its publics." They further that "It is through public relations that a company acts with responsibility and responsiveness—in policy and information—to the best interests of the institution and its public."

Implementing programmes of action: Public relations practitioners strategized on the needed action to undertake after thorough research. These programs are therefore executed in ways that will foster mutuality between the organization and the publics. All plans or programs must be well executed or implemented.

Both the organizations and public interest: Public relations are not one-way traffic. The objective of public relations is to create harmony between an organization and its various publics through effective communication to foster symbiotic relationships. The focus of public relations shouldn't be on parasitic relationships. While dishing out information to the public, the interest of both the organization and the public should be served. Bernays expressed that:

Public relations is not a one-way street in which leadership manipulates the public and public opinion. It is a two-way street in which leadership and the public find integration with each other and in which objectives and goals are predicated on a coincidence of public and private interests (quoted in Haynes and Newsom, 2008, p. 5).

The flow of information shouldn't be top-down. The organization while communicating with their various publics must expect feedback. The focus of public relations is to evaluate public opinions and communicate them to the management. The management, therefore, mirrors its decision in line with the trend in such a way that both the organization and the publics will benefit.

Public relations creates an open channel of communication where both the management and the publics can easily express and share opinions.

Public Relations Process

Public relations practice entails some basic processes or procedures. How effectively these procedures are adhered to will determine the success of the public relations campaign or action. For any public relations professional to function efficiently, understanding the importance of the following process is pertinent. The success or failure of any public relations endeavour depends largely on them.

Research: Research is a fact-finding endeavour undertaken to investigate the origin of a problem or phenomenon. It can also be regarded as information gathering. Research is vital in public relations practice. It serves as a guide to understanding the problem, its origin, trigger, and internal and external stimulator, and also to proffers a tenable solution to problems.

In planning any public relations activity, research is important because public relations professional needs to know the target audience before designing any campaign. Knowing the publics or target audience, or clients is imperative. Knowing the appropriate media is also important. Therefore, research comes in handy. Haynes and Newsom (2008, p. 59) said "Careful planning is central to the process and practice of professional public relations. Plans are generally successful in direct proportion to the quality of the information on which they are built."

Planning: Public relations actions are planned. They aren't executed haphazardly. It follows a pre-planned pattern. Messages are designed based on the research findings. Prior knowledge is used as the template to guide public relations activities. Situation analysis precedes planning. Haynes and Newsom expressed that the essence of a situation analysis is to answer the following questions:

What are the significant trends? What is the overall economic situation? What are the political considerations for the action we are contemplating? How is our organization perceived by the target publics? How are our competitors viewed by the target publics? How much support can we expect from the affected publics? (Haynes & Newsom, 2008, p. 59).

Through the use of either qualitative or quantitative methods of inquiry, the findings of situation analysis help in planning any public relations campaign. A good Plan is a booster before any action.

Action: Plans needed to be executed. The objective of

carrying out research and planning in public relations is to investigate the problem and proffer a solution. The findings of the research are used as a guide to design suitable actions to undertake. "Blind decision-making in public relations can have unsavoury consequences" (Olusegun, 2006, p. 40).

Communication: The planned actions need to be communicated to achieve the desired result. A large proportion of public relations work has to do with communication. Communication means the execution of planned action. This stage includes designing a message to tackle the perceived problem and selecting the appropriate media to communicate the message directly to the publics (Ridwanullah & Bala, 2022; Sule & Ridwanullah, 2021).

Evaluation: There is a need for the assessment of the success or otherwise of public relations efforts. Through evaluation, the fidelity of the public relations message can be determined. The theory of a two-way symmetric necessitated the need to create two two-way forms of communication whereby the message is sent to the audience while the receiver reacts to the message through feedback based on his/her assimilation of the received message. The fidelity of the message will be determined based on the interpretation by the receiver. The essence of evaluation is to investigate the success of the planned action.

All public relations endeavours have specific objectives or goals set to achieve. While the goals of the campaign determine the message, the targeted audience determines the media. Messages are designed to propagate the goals of the campaign.

The essence of evaluation is to first investigate the messages and monitor reaction from the messages (if the message and the language correlate?) then the media (if the targeted audience received the message), and the utilization of the budget (was it used judiciously? Was the budget enough?) (Olusegun, 2006).

What to Do As Public Relations Practitioner

The functions of public relations practitioners transcend being a spokesperson or media aid. Public relations practitioner requires high intellectual rigor and creativity to excel. Research, copywriting, public relations campaign planning and execution, media monitoring, and counseling are some of the key functions of public relations practitioner.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in Lattimore, et al (2009) identified eight (8) major key public relations functions.

a. **Programming:** programming entails planning of message, media, and budget.

b. **Relationship:** building cordiality between an individual/corporation and its publics is one of the cardinal responsibilities of public relations. Creating a two-way symmetric form of communication where the government, stakeholders, traditional leaders, and different the general Ummah can interact to foster mutuality. Establishing a good relationship with the media is also vital. Communication is the bedrock of building relationships as such; the function of public relations is to establish relationships with the media of communication.

c. **Writing and Editing:** Being incommunicado isn't a trait of public relations. Communicating with both the internal and external publics may be in writing or spoken words. These words are to be written and edited to avoid errors. Circulars such as newsletters, press releases, magazines, speeches, and scripts are crafted and edited for the fidelity of the message and to avoid grammatical errors and tautology. The ability to communicate in clear, concise, and fluent language is a treasure in public relations.

d. **Information:** the relationship between public relations and the media is symbiotic in the sense that the media satiation for information is fulfilled by public relations. Public relations uses information dissemination to achieve its objectives and goals. The media responsibility is to inform the public while public relations provides the information needed by the media. Both electronic and print media operate with different philosophies and time frames; public relations must become conversant with how the media work, the area of specialization in every media, and editorial policy. Getting information across to the media can be intriguing as well as frustrating. One needs to know which media specialize in what to make things work.

e. **Production:** Production of in-house publications is the responsibility of the public relations unit/department. In-house magazines, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, and journals, are products of writing and artwork. Public relations practitioners oversee the process even though they might not be professional in graphics.

f. **Special events:** Convergence for regional and national Da'wa, Annual General Meetings (AGM), Press Briefings, Press Conference, symposiums, Facility visits, Site tours, and other events of the organization are handled by the public relations practitioners. These events are carefully planned and systematically executed. Securing the venue for the events, and making the events worthwhile-security, refreshment, pre-event, during-event, and post-event media awareness and coordination of the event - are uniquely executed by the public relations practitioner.

g. **Speaking:** Communicating with the media might warrant public relations practitioners to feature on radio or television programs. Anchoring the organization's program, presenting speeches, writing speeches, and communicating physically with the publics are the

responsibility of public relations practitioners. Possessing good command of the language, fluency, and captivating oratory skill are added advantages to public relations practitioners.

h. **Research and Evaluation:** Public relations endeavours are not executed haphazardly. They are carefully planned using scientific/unscientific methods of inquiry to uncover the problem. Research is needed to understand the problem, the corporation, and the publics. Situation analysis comes in handy. Public relations research also adopts SWOT analysis to investigate the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of any phenomenon. Research is also paramount in determining the appropriate message and the media to use. The success of the public relations campaign is therefore evaluated using research to answer some salient questions lie: Is the message received by the public? Has it achieved its objective? Is the media appropriate? What is the campaign success rate? Is the budget enough? Response to these questions will be used to design another campaign if necessary. Lattimore, et al (2009) said "Research findings influence a public relations program's objectives and strategies, which in turn form the basis for evaluating its planning, implementation, and effectiveness".

Literature Review

Public relations (PR) has been identified as a key function for organizations in the twenty-first century, particularly for faith-based groups. Faith-based organizations work in a distinct context marked by social and cultural diversity, limited resources, and rivalry with other faith-based groups. Effective public relations tactics are critical for these organizations to overcome these problems and build a strong reputation.

The role of public relations in faith-based organizations has received a lot of attention in the literature. Kim et al. (2015) stated that public relations plays an important role in shaping religious organizations' image and reputation, whereas Jackson (2017) underlined the relevance of public relations in building trust and credibility among stakeholders. Adeyemo (2020) emphasized the importance of faith-based organizations implementing best practices in public relations to increase their visibility, reputation, and influence in the community.

Previous research has also highlighted the significance of public relations in promoting the mission and values of faith-based organizations. For example, Eweje (2011) discovered that public relations can assist faith-based organizations in effectively communicating their mission and values to stakeholders and in building good relationships with them. Similarly, Ojo (2014) stated that public relations is critical for a faith-based organization to publicize its activities and programs and build a

favourable image of the organization.

Aside from the function of public relations in defining the image and reputation of faith-based organizations, research has focused on the impact of public relations strategies on organizational success. For example, Nwachukwu and Ukaegbu (2018) discovered that strong public relations tactics can increase the financial performance and sustainability of faith-based organizations. Furthermore, Ezeh and Okafor (2019) stated that public relations can assist faith-based organizations in increasing their influence and attracting more supporters, which is critical for organizational success.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a reflection on the best approaches to embrace by Islamic-based organizations as such, the methodology is qualitative and relied on secondary data and the personal experience of the researcher. The study conducts a comprehensive literature review on the topic of public relations in faith-based organizations in Nigeria by searching academic databases, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and others, to identify relevant articles, books, and other resources. The literature review helps to identify the current state of knowledge on the topic and provides a framework for the data collection and analysis phases of the study.

Public Relations Best Practices for Faith-Based Organisation

As Muslims, our guide is the Qur'an and Sunnah. Allah the Most High ordered us in the Qur'an that:

Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best who have from His Path and who receive guidance (Q16:125).

Here, the Qur'an tells us that, yes we are enjoined to preach the deen. However, there should be modalities to it. The modalities are "wisdom and beautiful preaching". Similarly, as a faith-based organization, our public relations activities should be geared toward that. We should avoid practices that will tarnish the image of our organization and attract the punishment of Allah. False claims, black propaganda, lies, spin doctoring, and deliberate misleading of the public are not good features faith-based organizations should imbibe. As Allah stated in the Qur'an:

Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds, only (falling into) small faults- verily thy Lord is ample in forgiveness. He knows you well when He brings you out of the earth and when ye are hidden in your mother's wombs, therefore, justify not yourselves. He knows best

who it is that guards against evil (55:32).

Although public relations is a Western world idea, Muslims can also benefit from it without necessarily embracing its pitfalls. Faith-based organizations need to understand the empirical and creative aspects of the field of public relations. Research generates needed information used for public relations campaigns while ideation, creativity, and thoughtfulness produce reasonable concepts and tactical ways of connecting to the publics. To be successful in the field of public relations, a practitioner needs to:

1. Know the public or target audience: All public relations efforts are geared towards attaining favourable and mutual relationships with the publics. As such, the public relations practitioner needs to know the different publics of the organization. The publics are the set of people the organizations relate directly or indirectly with. The success of the public relations practitioner depends largely on how much he/she knows about the audience. Research is sacrosanct to knowing the public.
2. Clients: Public relations practitioner is seen as the reputation manager of his client as such, the professional needs to know/understand the client to succeed. Some clients have good reputations therefore the job of the practitioner is to utilize all public relations tools to sustain the favorable image of his client.
3. Select better ways of communication: there are different ways of communication. The practitioner needs to determine the most effective way to reach the publics. The choice between face-face, group, or mass communication depends largely on which one serves the purpose at a particular point in time. It is the prerogative of the practitioner to ascertain the appropriate ways of communicating with the publics.
4. The media: the success of any public relations practitioner depends largely on how much he/she understands the media. The job of the practitioner entails communicating with both the internal and external publics. Knowing the appropriate media to get information across to the public is paramount. Establishing a good rapport with the media makes the job of the practitioner easier. Both electronic and print media have their distinctive scope, strength, weakness, and audience. It is expected of the practitioner to understand the operation of the media.
5. Research: The ability to conduct research sets the pace for successful public relations practice. Research is vital to all public relations activities. Research is pivotal in understanding public relations phenomena, designing messages, and selecting the media of communication.
6. Monitor the reaction from the messages sent and analyze the reaction
7. Be proactive by anticipating the emergence of

problems and be prepared to tackle them. Successful public relations professionals are seldom caught off guard.

8. Projection of a positive image of the organization is the function of the public relations practitioner. As a reputation manager, the interest should not be on the negative side of the organization rather, it to project the positive side systematically.
9. Always be close to the top management to let them have confidence in you while performing your functions
10. You must devise a flier for writing as you may be required to write speeches or news items in the shortest possible time
11. PR Practitioners must be armed with facts and figures as it affects their organization in case of any inquiry either from their boss, the media, or the general public
12. PR Practitioners must always be around when their boss is granting interviews to members of the Press. This will enable him to guide his boss and furnish him with facts and also guard against misquotation
13. Ability to have confidence in oneself and courage to interact with the management and advice appropriately based on one's professional judgment

Crisis Management and Rapid Response Mechanisms

The crisis is inevitable in human endeavour. It should be expected. The practitioner should be proactive and anticipate the possibility of a crisis. Public figures and corporations faced a different crisis of different magnitude daily. It is the job of the PR practitioner to communicate to the media about these challenges. Crisis communication should be directed to both media and employees depending on the circumstance.

When an organization is involved in a crisis, the role of public relations may aggravate or douse the situation and it depends largely on the way the crisis is handled. When a crisis happened, it's always big news as such the media are so much interested in it as it is claimed that "bad news makes good news". The media might be interested in the persistence of the crisis because it gives them substance to report. The job of the public relations practitioner is to be prompt and factual. Sullivan (2001) reiterates that "in a crisis, the best course of action is to be forthcoming and honest and to do what it takes to facilitate stories". She furthers that engaging the media is important because "the media are going to write and air stories with or without your help. It's in your best interest to participate in a story- even a negative one – to have your position correctly represented". The PR practitioner needs to remain close to the media and keep furnishing them with updates and responding to their inquiries.

Crisis can be managed using all equipment of public

relations to strengthen and maintain the good reputation of an organization/individual. Lattimore et al (2009, p. 372) describe crisis communication as “using all the public relations tools available to preserve and strengthen an organization’s long-term reputation whenever it’s threatened”.

The crisis might arise as a result of unfounded rumours in the public sphere. Countering rumours always caused a problem for the PR practitioner because the dimension rumours will take is not anticipated. It’s always hard to verify the origin of the rumour, its source, how far it has reached, and the level of damage it has done or can do. The absence of statistical evidence to buttress facts by the practitioner also makes it difficult to counter rumours.

It is believed that rumours are bound to spread; it is the job of the practitioner to counter them. Lattimore et al (2009, p. 375) suggest that “the best defence is an offence as such, they highlight five (5) strategies to tackle rumours which are:

- a. Strive to increase and maintain trust and credibility.
- b. Keep audiences regularly informed through a variety of communication channels.
- c. Tailor each message to the audience receiving it so there’s less likelihood of it being misunderstood.
- d. Establish an ongoing rumour hotline and other two-way communication channels to seek questions and concerns from key publics. Use written communication to answer the questions posed.
- e. Monitor possible effects of rumours early intervention can be enacted if necessary. Crises are anticipated and it is the job of professionals to be too proactive in the necessary outbreak of the crisis.

Sullivan (2001: p. 62) observes that “the key to effective crisis communication is to be prepared before the crisis occurs. Once an emergency happens, there is little time to think much less to plan. Without a crisis plan, you can be overwhelmed by events.” Being proactive will help in the early curtailment of the crisis. Communication is vital in a crisis. A two-way form of communication must be established with the key stakeholders, the media, the employee, and the public relations department of an organization if there must be any chance of stemming the crisis. To address the crisis, scholars of crisis communication and management have suggested different strategies but the postulation of Marguerite Sullivan appears more realistic because it focuses on the pre-crisis, during-the-crisis, and post-crisis steps to take during crisis management in PR. Marguerite Sullivan, an American public affairs and communications a specialist on crisis communication and management in her book ‘A

Responsible Press Office: An Insider’s Guide, hypothesizes the following

Before A Crisis

- 1) Maintain trustworthy, credible relationships with the media all of the time. If you do, the media will be less suspicious and more cooperative amid the crisis.
- 2) Select someone to be the crisis manager.
- 3) Have the crisis manager collect information on potentially troublesome issues and trends. Evaluate them, gather data on them, and develop communications strategies to prevent or redirect their course.
- 4) Identify members of a possible crisis management team. Have in place their roles, actions to be taken, and, possible scenarios. Have a list of their office, home, and cell or mobile phone numbers., Also, have copies of their biographies. In a crisis, the press may want to know the backgrounds of those dealing with it.
- 5) Give designated spokespersons training in dealing with the media.
- 6) Determine the message, target, and media outlets that could be used in various crisis plans.
- 7) Have a list of the office, home, and cell or mobile phone numbers and the deadliness of reporters who might cover your organization in a crisis.
- 8) Have a plan for setting up a media crisis center. This should cover such items as desks, chairs, phones, parking, electrical outlets, placement of satellite trucks, copy machines, and even coffee. You also need to think about how to keep an office secure, particularly for your staff.

During A Crisis

- a. When a crisis hits, immediately get the word to the press. Otherwise, the media will get their information through other means.
- b. Set up a 24–hour crisis and media center at a central place from which news is released, rumours dealt with, facts gathered, and briefings held.
- c. Immediately ‘go public’ with a trained spokesperson at the scene to conduct press briefings. Let the media –and therefore the public know that you are dealing with the situation.
- d. Say what you know and only what you know. Don’t speculate. Don’t be bullied into saying anything based on rumour. If you don’t know something, admit it. Saying ‘the matter is under investigation’ may be the best response.
- e. Gather information as quickly as possible. Determine
- f. the basic who, what, when, where, and how. You

- might not get the ‘why’ until later.
- g. Get the government or agency leader and other top management to the crisis center. Cancel other plans. People want to see the leader, not just the public affairs staff. Having top management in front of the press during a crisis lends credibility and shows that the organization is not treating the situation lightly.
 - h. Inform your internal audiences – the staff and other government offices – at the same time you inform the press. If the press is the only source of information for the staff, morale can be damaged and employees can become confused and hurt, especially if the incident is reported inaccurately in the press. Because of where they work, the staff will be viewed as sources of information, and they can be the origin of leaks and rumours. Be sure they have it right.
 - i. Communicate with your internal audiences by email, if available, or through press releases and statements delivered to each office. If the staff is small enough, call a meeting at which members of the crisis team are available to answer staff questions.
 - j. Maintain a calm, gracious, and helpful presence. Avoid appearing flustered or overwhelmed.
 - k. Pre-empt negative publicity and communicate the actions being taken to solve the crisis. Verify news before releasing it.
 - l. Arrange for media access to the scene of the crisis. If at all possible. TV wants pictures. If there are space constraints, use press pool reports, with a representative of each type of media, wire service, newspaper, TV, radio, magazine, and photography – at the scene, writing up a report and taking a picture for their colleagues. No one may use these reports, including those in the pool until they have been distributed to everyone.
 - m. Take care of the practical needs of the press, such as packing, phones, electrical outlets, desks, and chairs.
 - n. Keep a log of reporters who have called, what they asked, their deadlines, what you promised, and to whom it was delegated.
 - o. Always return phone calls. If you don’t, reporters will look elsewhere for information. They will write a story with or without your help. Being not responsive takes control of a story away from you.
 - p. Simple sympathetic gestures can help rebuild the public’s confidence. Offer reassurance. Tell what actions are being taken to solve the problem, to help those affected, and to return things to normal. But, first, make sure you are doing what you said you are doing.
 - q. Make sure the press spokesperson is involved with senior management in every decision and policy made. Every decision has a public ramification, whether management recognizes it or not.
 - r. Avoid fixing blame. That can be done after an investigation.
 - s. Appeal to third-party endorsement for your effort. Get credible people who have been through similar experiences and command the public’s attention to speak on your behalf.
 - t. Update information frequently and regularly. Announce when your next update will be.
 - u. Monitor media reports and correct errors immediately.
 - v. Establish a website to inform people about the status of the situation. Put all news releases, statements, fact sheets, and links to other information on the site.
 - w. Establish an assessment group to study the problem and to prevent future occurrences. This is not for show; they should have real power.
 - x. Remember openness and responsiveness during a crisis and enhances your respect and credibility with the media. It can help you in the long run.

After A Crisis

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis plan and how people responded.
2. Correct problems so they don’t happen again.

Press Release Writing: Tips and Exercise

As a PR person, issuing a press release is one aspect of your job. As simple as this function appears, it is fundamental to creating a lasting relationship with the media. A well-written press release will not only makes the job of a journalist easier but also enhance the reputation of the PR practitioner and his organization. There is a level of disdain editors have for a bad release and the PR professional that produced it. There are hundreds of releases that end up in the dustbin rather than the pages of newspapers or on air. PR professionals should understand that his/her writing largely speaks about his/her reputation and professional competence. A bad release signposts a bad PR. Releases should be good enough for publication for any media organization without much modification. To achieve that, the principle of journalistic writing must be adhered to. The inverted pyramid must be adhered to. It should be giving the information as the journalist would. Approaches like ‘we are proud to announce’ or self-adulation mostly attract hostility from the editor.

Tips on Media Release Writing

Frank Jefkins recommends using a seven-point formula to determine major information that should be included in a release. This formula is described as Subject, Organization, Location, Advantages,

Applications, Details, and Source (SOLAADS).

The subject: the opening paragraph should tell the story in its entirety. The subject shouldn't be treated as the name of the organization. It should focus more on what the release is all about. 'One thousand Muslim students of ABU have benefited from the National Islamic Centre's yearly scholarship program' gives a greater proportion to the subject than 'the National Islamic Centre has given a scholarship to students of ABU'.

Organization: when the subject matter has been established, the name of the organization then follows. E.g the National Islamic Centre is an Islamic-based organization that promotes knowledge and justice in Nigeria.

Location: where the event takes place or the organization is located. E.g The event took place inside the convocation hall of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Advantages: what is epic and special that requires public attention? E.g. increment of beneficiaries from 200 to 1000.

Applications: What are the essence and benefit, and who is the beneficiary of the event?

Details: What is the additional information the public need to know? How were the beneficiaries selected, who is supporting the organization with the fund, can Muslim students in other universities also so benefit, etc?

Source: who is signing the release? Whom are the journalists going to credit for the information?

This formula helps PR professionals graphically determine what should be included in a release. It helps in avoiding the omission of vital information.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that public relations strive at establishing a mutual relationship between an organization and the general public. Islam as a religion also enjoined mutual coexistence among the ummah. Therefore, Islamic-based organizations need to strive toward establishing and maintaining mutual understanding among the ummah as ordained by Allah.

Similarly, during times of crisis, one of the saving graces for an organization is the relationship already cultivated before the crisis. Building mutual understanding with the media is therefore important to elicit the support of the media during the crisis and have a chance of having a fair hearing in the media space.

Effective communication channels, a media plan, relationships with media, transparency and accountability, prompt responses to inquiries, positive relationships with members, promoting the organization's mission and values, and participating in community events is crucial for promoting a positive public image and advancing the mission of faith-based organizations in

Nigeria.

It is recommended that faith-based organizations in Nigeria prioritize the implementation of best practices in public relations. This includes establishing clear communication channels, developing a media plan, building relationships with media, being transparent and accountable, responding promptly to inquiries, fostering positive relationships with members, promoting the organization's mission and values, and participating in community events. By implementing these best practices, faith-based organizations can effectively communicate with the public, maintain a positive public image, and advance their mission to reach more people.

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