

PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

HOW PERCEPTION, TRUST, AND COMMUNICATION SHAPE REPUTATION

*A practical guide for PR professionals, journalists, communication officers, NGOs, and
public sector leaders*

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About the author

I am Prudence Okeoghene Emudianughe, a PhD Candidate in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Port Harcourt. My work focuses on the intersection of artificial intelligence and journalism, especially how new technologies are shaping communication, trust, and public understanding.

I came to understand public relations more deeply not just through academic study, but through practice. In many ways, I realised I had been doing PR long before I could formally name it. In writing, storytelling, advocacy, and even in everyday communication, I was already learning how meaning is shaped and how perception is formed.

It was during my work in corporate and communication environments that this became clearer. I saw how public relations is often present in everything an organisation does, even when it is not formally acknowledged. I also saw how, in many academic settings, PR was not always strongly emphasized as a distinct field until communication studies expanded and public relations emerged more clearly as its own discipline.

This shaped how I approach the field today, as something practical, lived, and deeply connected to everyday communication, not just theory.

Beyond academia, I am a filmmaker, poet, and writer, with a focus on health awareness and empowerment through storytelling.

I currently serve as a National Health Fellow representing Ethiope West Local Government in Delta State, and I am the Programs Lead for the FactCheckAfrica AI Journalism Fellowship Program in West Africa, where I work with journalists on the ethical use of artificial intelligence in reporting and communication.

My work spans media, technology, and public engagement. I have founded a proptech startup, Prugems, mentored young girls through the Technovation Girls Global Challenge, and been recognized in poetry and spoken word platforms including the Alitfest Poetry Grand Slam, Poets in Nigeria, and the Awka Poetry Slam.

I have also worked in media production and fact-checking, including volunteering during the 2023 general elections with FactCheck Elections and working with the Anambra Broadcasting Service as a video editor.

Across all these experiences, my interest has remained the same: understanding how communication shapes trust, how trust shapes perception, and how perception shapes reality in both public and personal spaces.

Preface

Public relations is often treated as something that belongs to big organizations, government agencies, and corporate communication teams. But in reality, it is something we all practice every day, often without noticing.

Every time someone explains themselves in a conversation, responds to misunderstanding, shares a story online, or tries to change how they are perceived by others, they are engaging in a form of public relations. It happens in small moments, in personal relationships, in workplaces, and increasingly in digital spaces where perception spreads quickly and widely.

At its core, public relations is about how we are understood by others. That makes it both deeply personal and highly professional at the same time.

For organizations, public relations is even more important. It shapes how institutions are trusted, how policies are received, and how services are judged. Yet it is often misunderstood as something secondary or cosmetic, something that comes after decisions are made rather than something that should guide how decisions are communicated in the first place.

Many organizations focus heavily on operations, strategy, and delivery, while paying less attention to how those actions are interpreted by the public. The result is often a gap between intention and perception. This gap is where trust is either built or lost.

In a world where information spreads quickly and public judgment forms in real time, this gap has become more visible and more costly. A single message can be interpreted in many ways. A small issue can grow into a public concern. A well-designed policy can face resistance simply because it was not communicated in a way that connects with people's lived experience.

This book is written to bridge that gap. It presents public relations not as a technical function reserved for specialists, but as a practical way of thinking about communication, trust, and relationships. It shows how meaning is formed, how perception develops, and how organizations can communicate more clearly and responsibly in a complex environment.

More importantly, it reminds us that public relations is not separate from everyday life. It is part of how we relate to each other, how we are seen, and how we respond when that understanding breaks down.

Whether at the level of individuals or institutions, the challenge remains the same: how do we ensure that what we intend is not lost in how it is understood?

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How to use this book

This book is written for practice. Each chapter begins with a real situation, explains the idea behind it, and shows how it applies in communication work. You will also find short exercises at the end of each chapter.

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