

MARCH 2024

ISSUE 002

# ExperiencingPR

## QUIET WARS:

## Leveraging Public Relations for Conflict Management

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**NAVIGATING THE CHAOS:**  
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS  
IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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**PUBLIC RELATIONS IN**  
A RAPIDLY CHANGING  
WORLD

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**EVALUATING THE ROLE**  
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN  
A WORKPLACE CONFLICT



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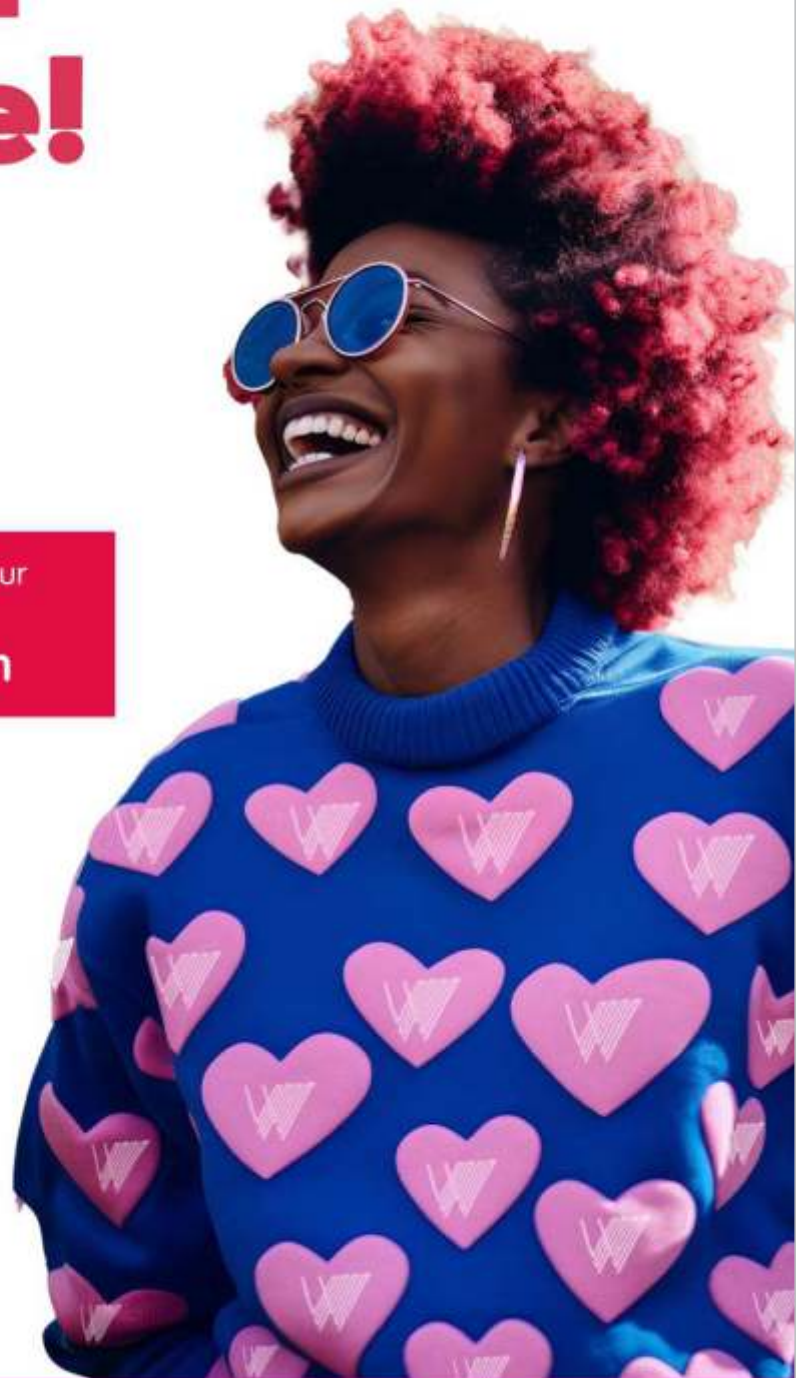
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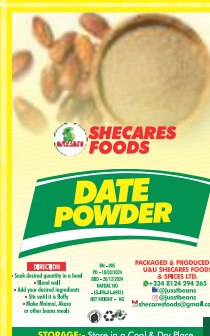
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## Letter From the Editor

### *We must learn from the past to guide the actions of the present and deliver a future to be proud of.*

Where is that quiet voice to provide insight into knotty Public Relations challenges when you do not have an expert on speed dial? Well, here you have it: welcome to Issue II of the ExperiencingPR Magazine by Public Relations Women Foundation (Nigerian Women in PR).

What a year it has been since Experiencing PR 2023! When we launched the first issue of the Experiencing PR magazine during the 2023 conference, our excitement was palpable. After all, this is one of the few industry publications that provides advisory and insights from Public Relations professionals for business leaders and society at large.

Our vision for this publication has since become clearer, and the potential for impact is even more incredible. The role of Public Relations in providing strategic advisory for leaders in the public and private sectors across developing economies has become more critical in the wake of enlightened customers and a demanding citizenry. No longer is it acceptable to ignore questions from the least paying buyer, to provide superficial and dismissive responses to probing interrogation from voters, or to overlook the sullen quietness of reports and subordinates at the office.

In the last year, gang violence has worsened in Haiti with calls for revolution, the Israel Hamas war has broken out in the Middle East, the Russian-Ukraine war in Europe remains a global concern, there has been military interruption of democratic government in Niger, with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger announcing their exit from ECOWAS following sanctions. That is a lot, but that is not all that has happened.

In the public and private sector, changes in government have meant that new leaders have been appointed and promoted. The responsibility of nurturing and leading a cohesive team rest squarely on these new crop of leaders – whether they are tested hands or new to the system, expectations are high all around. There is no luxury of time to settle on the job – the people need results NOW. This is understandable, given stifling economic challenges facing developing countries and its effect on the people.

All these are fertile grounds for quiet wars to fester if issues are not quickly identified and addressed. How? Communication.

Communication is a pivotal skill for all leaders. When issues arise, the role of a strategic Public Relations advisor in decision making is critical. The expertise of a Public Relations consultant lies in their ability to proactively assess situations, anticipate potential crises areas and providing strategies to mitigate conflicts that can lead to wars. But their functionality will only be enhanced when they are engaged by listening executives who act on their recommendations.

In Issue II of the Experiencing PR Magazine, various experts from developing countries like Nigeria, India, Ghana, and Kenya explore topics that are peculiar to these economies, and the Public Relations strategies that can guide leaders in proactive decision making. Article titles include Navigating the Chaos: The Role of Public Relations in Conflict Management; Proactive PR: Anticipating and Managing Conflicts through Strategic Communications; Fighting Disease on the Battlefield: Communications Lessons from the DRC Ebola Crisis, amongst other insightful submissions.

The expertise of our contributors shine through as they analyse past quiet war scenarios while providing general guidance to navigate these current times.

In this magazine, we also publish the second edition of the Global Directory of Nigerian Women Owned/Led PR Firms, our practical initiative for organisations to #InvestinWomen, thereby accelerating their progress. The Directory gets the foot of our listed agencies in the doors of organisations keen on inclusion and providing equal access to opportunities. We reiterate the importance of not paying lip service to inclusion but to provide data-backed solutions to the specific challenges women face in accessing opportunities.

Finally, we celebrate our world class speakers at the Experiencing PR 2024 Annual Conference for giving of their time to discuss the pertinent subject of how they have leveraged Public Relations to address quiet wars in their organisations and leadership journeys. Our Mentors and Mentees for the Open Mentorship Chat add a unique flavour to the delicious aroma of the 2024 Conference and we look forward to doing this again on a bigger scale in 2025.

Have a good read!



**Tolulope 'Tolucomms' Olorundero**

*Editor-in-Chief & Founder,  
Nigerian Women in PR*

## ExperiencingPR 2024 Conference Speakers



**Nddi Okonkwo Nwuneli**  
Founder, LEAP Africa and African Food Changemakers



**Lucy Pearson**  
Country Director, British Council Nigeria and Director West Africa



**Debbie Larry-Izamoje**  
Chief Operating Officer, Brila Media Limited



**Osayi Alile**  
C.E.O Aspire Coronation Trust Foundation



**Hemant Gaule**  
Dean, School of Communications & Reputation, India



**Yomi Badejo-Okusanya**  
Lead Partner, CMC Connect LLP



**Abimbola Bolaji**  
MD/CEO, Integrated Indigo Limited



**Odiri Erewa-Maggison FCIS**  
Director, External Affairs, BAT West and Central Africa



**Edemekong Uyoh**  
Regional Head, Cultural Engagement Marketing and Communications, Sub Saharan Africa, British Council

## ExperiencingPR 2024 Conference Speakers



**James Hewes**  
CEO, Public Relations and  
Communications Association (PRCA)



**Nene Isinomen Bejide**  
Founder, Blanche Aigle Communications



**Eloine Barry**  
Founder/CEO, African Media Agency



**Akinde Jesutofunmi T.**  
Public Relations and Communications  
executive/LinkedIn Top Public Relations Voice



**Ayobami Awode**  
Chief of Staff, HerVest



**Olubusola Abidakun**  
Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Ministry of  
Establishments and Training



**Orifunke Lawal**  
Special Assistant to the Governor of Lagos State



**Nkechi Ali-Balogun**  
Principal Consultant, NECCI Consulting



**Ronke Giwa-Onafuwa**  
Award-Winning Broadcaster





**Dr. IKE NELIAKU** Ph.D, fnipr, ficmc  
**President / Chairman of Council, NIPR**

Dr. Ike Neliaku is a resourceful professional and marketplace entrepreneur, with wealth of experience spanning over 30 years in development communication, information management, public administration, leadership and governance.

He holds both Ph.D. in Development Studies and Masters in Political Economy from the University of Abuja, and Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre Arts from the University of Jos. He also earned a Certificate from London School of Economics.

Was appointed Senior Special Assistant (Administration) to the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010 - 2015, served as Member, Governing Council, Federal University, Gusau, 2015 – 2016 and worked in the public service for over 20 years, holding key positions in Federal Ministries and The Presidency at different times.

In the private sector, Dr Neliaku has worked as Director Programmes, Institute of Civil Society, Abuja; Founding Vice Chairman/CEO, abc Shelters Ltd (a property development company); Executive Vice Chairman, Rightangle PR; Executive Producer, Rightangle Productions; Convener, Issachar Centre for Research and Development; Member, Governing Board and Executive Secretary, Nigerian Prize for Leadership.
































Travelled to over 45 countries as a member of various federal government delegations, participated in more than 55 technical missions on sustainable development, information and communication management, negotiations and diplomacy, cultural relations, public sector administration, infrastructure development, leadership and management development, gender empowerment, youth development, etc.

Dr. Neliaku, has been in public relations practice in the public and private sectors for over 35 years. On 25th of August 2023, he was elected as the 15th President and Chairman of Council, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

He is a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR); Fellow, African Public Relations Association (APRA); Fellow; Institute of Chartered Mediators and Conciliators; Fellow, Institute of Management Consultants; Fellow, Institute of Entrepreneurs; and Life Member Society for International Development (SID), Italy.

He is also the author of '7 Conspiracies of Power', a 662-page authoritative exposé on Nigerian politics, politricks and politicians.

# EXPERIENCING PR 2024 CONFERENCE AGENDA

9:30 am - 10:00 am	Welcome & Registration									
10:00 am - 10:05 am	Welcome									
10:05 am - 10:10 am	National Anthem									
10:10 am & 10:20 am	<b>Founders Address</b>  <b>Tolulope Olorundero</b> Public Relations Consultant & Founder, Nigerian Women in PR									
10:20 am & 10:30 am	<b>Message from PRCA Global</b>  <b>James Hewes</b> CEO, Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA)									
10:30 am & 10:55am	<b>Keynote Address - Quiet Wars: Leveraging Public Relations for Conflict Management</b>  <b>Ndidi Okonkwo Nwuneli</b> Founder, LEAP Africa & African Food Changemakers									
10:55 am - 11:00 am	Spoken Word									
11:00 am & 12:00 pm	<b>Experience Panel - From the Generals: Stakeholder Management Strategies that Worked</b> <div><div>PANELISTS</div><div><b>Debbie Lany-Izamoje</b> CEO, Wella Beauty (Nigeria)</div><div><b>Olayinka Aile</b> CEO, Aile Group</div><div><b>Lucy Pearson</b> Managing Director, The PEARSON Group</div><div><b>Nene Ighomen Bajele</b> CEO, Bajele Group</div><div>MODERATOR</div></div>									
12:00 pm & 12:20 pm	Magazine & Book Launch									
12:20 pm - 12:25 pm	Wema Bank Presentation 									
12:25 pm & 12:35 pm	Break - Speed Networking + Snack Break									
12:35 pm & 12:40 pm	<b>Special Address</b>  <b>Hemant Gaule</b> Dean, School of Communications and Reputation, India									
12:40 pm - 1:40 pm	<b>Industry Panel - PR Strategies to Win Quiet Wars in Business and Government</b> <div><div>PANELISTS</div><div><b>Bolaji Akintola</b> MD/CEO, Integrated Intelligence</div><div><b>Bake Berry</b> Founder &amp; CEO, Berry Media Agency</div><div><b>Odi Olowu</b> Managing Director, FCIS</div><div><b>Edemkolong Uyah</b> Regional Head, Corporate &amp; Institutional Relations, Equinor Nigeria Equinor Africa, Shell Nigeria</div><div>MODERATOR</div></div>									
1:40 pm & 2:25 pm	<b>Break out Sessions: Open Mentorship Chat</b> <table><tr><th>Public Relations</th><th>Business</th><th>Public Sector</th></tr><tr><td><b>Yomi Badojo-Olusanya</b> Managing Director, Yomi Group</td><td><b>Joycee Awosika</b> Managing Director, Joycee Media</td><td><b>Oluwatade Ajibola</b> Managing Director, Lagos State Public Relations Office, Lagos State</td></tr><tr><td><b>Jesuafunmi Akinde</b> Public Relations &amp; Corporate Communications Manager, Bridgeway Africa</td><td><b>Ayobami Awode</b> Chief of Staff, Ministry of Health</td><td><b>Orifunke Lawal</b> Deputy Governor of Lagos State</td></tr></table>	Public Relations	Business	Public Sector	 <b>Yomi Badojo-Olusanya</b> Managing Director, Yomi Group	 <b>Joycee Awosika</b> Managing Director, Joycee Media	 <b>Oluwatade Ajibola</b> Managing Director, Lagos State Public Relations Office, Lagos State	 <b>Jesuafunmi Akinde</b> Public Relations & Corporate Communications Manager, Bridgeway Africa	 <b>Ayobami Awode</b> Chief of Staff, Ministry of Health	 <b>Orifunke Lawal</b> Deputy Governor of Lagos State
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2:25 pm - 2:35 pm	Vote of Thanks & Closing									
2:35 pm - 3:00 pm	Photographs									

## We value your feedback!

Please take a moment to share your thoughts with us by filling out our feedback form - <https://bit.ly/EPRFeedback>  
Thank you for being a part of the 2024 Experiencing PR Conference.

## PR Industry faces crisis as Paid Commentators erode credibility in Nigeria's media landscape — Zion Rufus



The menace of paid commentators, often employed by quack PR entities and personalities, has ushered in an era where the essence of PR is diluted, ethical standards are compromised, and misinformation runs rampant. Particularly in today's digital landscape, where everything from social media stunts to paid promotions is labeled as PR, the true nature of public relations has been overshadowed.

The industry, meant to uphold ethical standards and maintain professionalism, now finds itself entangled in a web of orchestrated narratives and counter-narratives, all fueled by the manipulation of public opinion through paid commentators. These human agents, strategically positioned on social media platforms, aim to manipulate public opinion on social, economic, and political issues by generating comments that fuel arguments, hurl insults, denigrate other users and public figures, cast doubt on ideas they have been contracted to find disagreeable and create a toxic online environment.

While bots contribute to the dissemination of fake news, it's essential to recognize that real individuals orchestrate the majority of re-transmissions. The disturbing reality is that people are more prone to sharing fake news than real news, amplifying its impact through likes, shares, and comments. Not only does this undermine the credibility of genuine content, but it also instigates a wave of negativity

that permeates the online environment as they propagate fake news stories aligned with their ideological inclinations and employ aggressive tactics to intimidate individuals who challenge their narratives.

Social media, once a vibrant space for genuine engagement, has now become a breeding ground for these mercenaries of misinformation. Social media platforms, regulators, governments, and authentic PR agencies now face the Herculean task of combating the rampant trend of paid commentators. These individuals, often lurking behind the anonymity of online accounts, are employed to sow discord, challenge real news stories, and create social and political chaos within the online and offline communities.

According to a report from the Center for Information Technology and Society, fake news relies on social media for dissemination to be most effective. Research indicates that people are more prone to sharing fake news than real news, adding another layer to the challenge of combating this growing issue. Social media platforms, governments, and PR practitioners must collaborate to address this menace. The responsibility falls not only on PR professionals to weed out quacks but also on governments and platforms to crack down on the purveyors of misinformation.

---

**Addressing this issue demands a collaborative effort. PR practitioners must intensify their efforts to identify and eliminate quacks within the industry. Simultaneously, governments and social media platforms bear a significant responsibility in curbing the influence of these trolls. Implementing stringent measures to identify and penalize paid commentators will restore the integrity of the digital landscape. Only through this united front can the menace of paid commentators be subdued, allowing public relations to regain its standing as a beacon of truth and ethical communication in Nigeria.**

---

### Bio:

Zion Rufus is an award-winning brand and marketing journalist, copywriter, and exceptional content writer with a rich background in marketing communications, trade journalism, and public relations. To contribute effectively and creatively foster growth, she is focused on creating exceptional editorial content, articles, and initiatives that foster audience engagement, promote brand exposure, and showcase the importance of high-quality content



## FIGHTING DISEASE ON THE BATTLEFIELD: Communication lessons from the DRC Ebola crisis

— Jessica Ilunga



Imagine the terror of being chased by an angry mob. Or the anguish of ducking under your bed with a bulletproof vest because of an armed attack on your hotel. Or the dismay of watching treatment centers set ablaze.

This is not the scenario of a doomsday movie but the harrowing reality of healthcare workers during the 2018 Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This Ebola outbreak was unprecedented as it was the first in the world's history to unfold within a conflict zone.

Yet, as unique as this situation was, it is unlikely to be the last of its kind. The increasing number of armed conflicts worldwide, coupled with the threats posed by climate change, points towards a growing likelihood of deadly diseases emerging in conflict zones. And communication professionals better be prepared.

### A looming threat

Armed conflicts pose significant public health challenges. In Yemen, prolonged warfare has ravaged healthcare infrastructure, leaving millions without essential medical care.

In Sudan, the ongoing armed conflict has caused the displacement of millions of people, creating conditions where diseases can spread rapidly in overcrowded camps. Countries in the Sahel region face challenges in maintaining public health measures, including vaccination, leading to the resurgence of preventable diseases.

Climate change further exacerbates these issues, acting as a threat multiplier in conflict zones. Rising temperatures can expand the reach of mosquito-borne diseases like Zika or yellow fever. Human displacements can increase wildlife contact, raising the risk of zoonotic diseases. Furthermore, climate change-driven food and water scarcity can fuel conflict and displacement, perpetuating a vicious cycle of instability and diseases.

### Facing the Congolese mayhem

When the Ebola outbreak was declared in the town of Beni in August 2018, the conflict in Eastern Congo had been raging for two decades, leaving the health system in tatters. Due to delayed presidential elections, an intense political crisis further complicated the situation.

It created a lethal cocktail that severely eroded local communities' trust in government and international organisations. This distrust stemmed from their perceived failure to effectively end the conflict and safeguard civilian lives. Such dynamics posed a formidable challenge in managing the Ebola outbreak, as community engagement and trust are paramount in controlling the spread of deadly diseases.

### Lessons from the Front Line

Remember the 2014-2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak? According to the World Bank, affected countries (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) suffered an estimated \$2.8 billion loss. Thus, beyond disease containment, our communication strategy aimed to mitigate the crisis's potential economic and reputational fallout. While navigating this complex landscape, three fundamental principles guided our approach: building international credibility, building trust with communities, and building bridges with journalists.

#### a) Building credibility: messaging strategy

Key strategies for effective messaging during a crisis include

- **Honesty and transparency:** Acknowledge uncertainties and maintain open communication. Being transparent about what is known and unknown during unpredictable emergencies will help you manage unexpected blows without losing credibility.
- **Timely communication:** Quickly filling the information void created by the crisis is essential. If the government is too slow to respond, misinformation will take root. Regular briefings and updates can ensure you keep control over the crisis narrative. At the Ministry of Health, we launched daily Ebola updates that quickly became the central feature of our communication. They contained data on the epidemiological situation and some news on the day-to-day work of health agents.
- **Consistent messaging:** Contradictory statements from different officials will undermine public trust and government credibility. Select and train spokespersons carefully to ensure unified and consistent messaging. Before a crisis, organising media training for government officials and other spokespersons is necessary.
- **Providing selected spokespersons with up-to-date information and approved talking points is critical during the crisis.**

#### **b) Building trust: community engagement**

Effective public health interventions in a conflict zone require having influential allies within the community. Recognising the unique dynamics of Eastern Congo, we tailored our approach to community engagement to the unique challenges we faced:

- **Engaging unlikely partners:** We had no choice but to collaborate with controversial figures, such as rebel group leaders and traditional healers, whose authority and trust within their community were invaluable.

- **Targeting the youth:** As young men were often involved in violence against response teams, we devised creative engagement strategies to connect with them. One such initiative was organising a football tournament for local youth teams. This event served as a powerful engagement tool, drawing crowds and providing an opportunity to share Ebola prevention measures in an engaging and relatable way.
- **Leveraging social media:** We used platforms like WhatsApp groups to connect and foster a dialogue with communities. We trained local students to address their communities' concerns and counter misinformation in these WhatsApp groups, making them active participants and allies of our response efforts.

#### **c) Building Bridges: Media Relations**

In times of crisis, the spotlight inevitably turns to the affected country, sparking intense media interest. The heightened attention requires skillful management. In DRC, we adopted a collaborative approach with journalists, treating them as essential allies in our mission to inform and educate the public.

#### **Our media relations strategy involved:**

- **Swift and direct engagement:** We established direct communication channels to respond swiftly to media inquiries, including dedicated WhatsApp groups for journalists, allowing for immediate updates, quick clarifications, and a two-way flow of information. Being open and accessible to journalists offered a twofold advantage: it not only established us as a trusted source of information but also provided the opportunity to increase the representation of Congolese experts in international media coverage.

- **Health communication training for local journalists:** Recognising the challenges faced by local media in terms of limited resources and training, especially in public health reporting, we conducted specialised training sessions for journalists. These sessions aimed to provide them with essential knowledge about public health and epidemiology and improve the quality and accuracy of their reporting on the Ebola crisis.

**Not if, but when: Bracing ourselves for what lies ahead**  
This unprecedented crisis in the DRC is a forewarning of the complexities future outbreaks may present worldwide. In these high-stakes situations, communication cannot be sidelined as a peripheral activity. It becomes the lifeline of the crisis response. By fostering trust and diffusing tensions, communication can build bridges between former antagonists and forge a path through the surrounding chaos toward the common goal of successful disease containment.

As we look to the future, these lessons should shape how we prepare for and respond to similar crises. They remind us that clear, compassionate, and strategic communication can guide and unite us in the heart of chaos.

#### **Bio:**

Jessica Ilunga is a strategic communication specialist passionate about sharing Africa's story with the world. As the Co-founder and Strategic Communication Partner of Galuni Consulting Associates, an Africa-focused advisory firm based in Brussels, she advises clients in the private and the public sectors to help them achieve their communication goals.

Throughout her career, she has worked for public relations agencies, public institutions, and philanthropic organisations, where she leveraged the power of communication to initiate change on and for the continent. She has successfully led diverse campaigns in various sectors, including global health, education, and women's rights.

Jessica holds a Master's degree in European and International Law from the Catholic University of Leuven, a Master's degree in Global Politics from the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, and a Certificate in Public Diplomacy from the USC Center on Public Diplomacy.

# CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANS: A NECESSITY IN CONFLICT-PRONE ENVIRONMENTS

— Blessing C. Emmanuel-Macaulay 



In the ever-shifting landscape of organisational dynamics, conflict-prone environments resemble the Wild West, where uncertainty and tension often ride shotgun. It's a realm where disagreements can swiftly morph into a full-blown crisis faster than you can say "emergency meeting." Navigating these tumultuous terrains necessitates more than just strategic thinking; it demands a well-honed crisis communication plan.

Within the chaotic dance of organisational conflicts, effective communication emerges as the unsung hero – a guiding force helping organisations steer through high tensions, lack of trust, and the potential powder keg of unresolved disagreements. Yet, let's face it, trying to communicate effectively in conflict-prone and crisis environments is akin to tap-dancing in a minefield.

Communicating effectively in conflict-prone environments is tough and challenging due to strong emotions, differing perspectives, and a history of unresolved conflicts. The complexities are myriad. First, there's the need to consider all the people involved and tailor unique

messages to each audience. Making decisions quickly within these environments can also be tough, especially when crucial information is lacking, but maintaining trust and credibility is non-negotiable. It sounds like a lot to handle. Little wonder that many organisations draft crisis communication plans, yet only 23% revealed seamless integration (PwC, 2023).

Regardless, some organizations have mastered the art of successfully planning and implementing crisis communication plans in conflict-prone environments, offering valuable lessons. Take, for instance, the Airbnb Discrimination Crisis in 2016. When Airbnb faced discrimination allegations on its platform, the company responded by implementing anti-discrimination policies, launching a comprehensive review, and engaging with affected communities.

Hence, with a clear and carefully planned crisis communication plan, an organisation can navigate these challenges and crises peculiar to conflict-prone environments. This leads us to a crucial question: what is a crisis communication plan?

It is a strategic framework that organisations develop to effectively manage and respond to emergencies, crises, or conflict situations. The plan outlines communication strategies, protocols, and actions to be taken during a crisis to ensure timely and accurate information dissemination, maintain public trust, and mitigate potential risks or negative impacts.

Why are crisis communication plans a necessity in conflict-prone environments? One primary reason is to mitigate risks and prevent further escalation. In these environments, tensions are high, and communication breakdowns are common. A well-defined crisis communication plan allows organisations to respond swiftly and effectively, reducing the chances of misunderstandings, rumours, or the spread of misinformation. By providing clear and consistent messaging, crisis communication plans help manage expectations, address concerns, and prevent situations from worsening.

Building trust and credibility is another crucial aspect of crisis communication plans in conflict-prone environments. Trust is often eroded in these situations, and people may be skeptical of official statements or information. Organisations can demonstrate transparency, honesty, and accountability by having a comprehensive crisis communication plan in place. This can help rebuild trust and credibility, enabling effective communication and stakeholder collaboration.

Crisis communication plans also play a vital role in minimising misinformation and rumours. Rumours can spread rapidly in conflict-prone environments, leading to further tensions and misunderstandings. Organisations can ensure that accurate information is disseminated promptly by having designated spokespersons and clear communication channels. This helps counteract false narratives, maintain public confidence, and prevent the escalation of conflicts fueled by misinformation.



**To be effective, crisis communication plans should typically have several key components including a designated team responsible for managing communication during a crisis. This team should consist of individuals with diverse expertise and roles, such as a spokesperson, public relations professionals, legal advisors, and representatives from relevant departments. Clear roles and responsibilities must be established, ensuring everyone knows their roles in the crisis response team and can act swiftly and confidently during a crisis. This helps streamline the decision-making and communication process during high-pressure situations.**

Preparing key messages in advance is also crucial, as it saves valuable time and allows for consistent and coordinated communication across all channels. These messages should be carefully crafted to address the crisis, provide accurate and timely information, and align with the organization's values and objectives. Also, the crisis communication plan should outline the various channels to be used, including press releases, social media platforms, websites, or direct communication with stakeholders. Each channel should be assessed for its effectiveness, reach, and ability to disseminate information quickly and accurately.

An effective crisis communication plan should include a media relations strategy that outlines how the organisation will interact with the media during a crisis, including press conferences, media briefings, and interviews. It should also provide guidelines for spokespersons on how to handle media inquiries, ensuring consistent messaging and avoiding potential pitfalls. Internal communication is equally as important as external communication. Hence, the crisis communication plan should include strategies for communicating with stakeholders, employees, and other internal audiences. This may involve regular updates, town hall meetings, or internal memos.

With the increasing adoption and widespread use of digital technologies, the world of communication is constantly evolving, and crisis communication is no exception.

Let's take a moment to peek into the future of crisis communications. Emerging trends and innovations that are shaping the future of crisis communication include but are not limited to, interactive chatbots to provide real-time updates, answer queries, and offer a human-like interaction during crises and emergencies. Blockchain technology is also gaining traction for enhancing transparency in crisis communication. These emerging trends add a forward-looking perspective to crisis communication.

The importance of crisis communication plans in conflict-prone environments cannot be overstated. Remember, a crisis can strike at any moment, and being prepared with a comprehensive crisis communication plan can make all the difference in effectively navigating the challenges. So, be proactive and equip your organisation with an effective crisis communication plan to handle crises confidently and resiliently.

#### Bio:

Blessing Chidinma Emmanuel-Macaulay is the driving force behind PR Fusions, a strategic communications agency that helps organisations in drafting compelling narratives that drive business growth.

With a wealth of experience in journalism, digital marketing, and strategic communications across technology brands, she has helped businesses create strategic messages that resonate with audiences. She boasts a proven track record of delivering effective PR campaigns, and through her leadership, businesses have achieved their goals, significantly enhancing brand awareness. Blessing is a seasoned professional dedicated to navigating the dynamic intersection of technology and communication with finesse and innovation.



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
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# Navigating the Chaos: The Role of Public Relations in Conflict Management

— Emma Wenani



## Introduction

In an era marked by rapid information dissemination and heightened public scrutiny, organizations face a constant challenge: dealing with conflict situations while preserving their reputation and public image. Public Relations (PR) emerges as a crucial player in this scenario, serving as a strategic tool to manage, mitigate, and often prevent conflict.

This article delves into the evolving role of Public Relations in conflict management, emphasizing its impact on organisational resilience and stakeholder relationships.

### Understanding Conflict Management

Conflict is inevitable in any organisational setting, whether sparked by internal disputes, external pressure, or unforeseen crises, conflicts can escalate quickly, generating negative publicity, eroding trust, and undermining the credibility of a person or brand.

Whether it's a corporate scandal, a product recall, or a labor dispute, how an organisation handles conflict can significantly influence its long-term success. In this age of social media and instant news, the stakes are higher than ever, making the role of Public Relations indispensable.

Effective conflict management therefore seeks to address these challenges proactively, seeking to resolve disputes, restore stability, and preserve the integrity of the entities involved.

### The Essence of Public Relations

Public Relations is about fostering mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. It encompasses strategic communication, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement, all aimed at building

trust, enhancing credibility, and shaping perceptions. In times of conflict, PR practitioners serve as frontline mediators, strategists, and advocates, navigating the complexities of crisis communication and working to steer organizations through turbulent waters.

## 1. Proactive Reputation Management

Public Relations professionals play a critical role in proactively managing an organization's reputation. Instead of waiting until conflict arise, strategic PR involves consistently building and nurturing positive relationships with key stakeholders. By establishing a strong foundation of credibility and transparency, organizations can weather storms more effectively when conflict does happen.

## 2. Crisis Communication Strategies

When conflict escalates into a crisis, the ability to communicate effectively becomes essential. PR professionals are often at the forefront, developing crisis communication strategies that address the issue head-on while ensuring the organization's integrity is kept intact. This includes crafting clear messages, selecting appropriate communication channels, and ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination.

## 3. Stakeholder Engagement

In times of conflict, maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders cannot be downplayed. PR professionals act as liaisons between the organization and its various audiences, ensuring that concerns are heard, and feedback is acknowledged. This engagement fosters a sense of trust and transparency, helping to minimize the negative impact of conflict on an organization's relationships.

## 4. Shaping Narratives

Public Relations strategies involve not only responding to conflicts but also actively shaping the narrative surrounding them. By crafting compelling and authentic stories, PR professionals can influence public perception, steering the conversation away from negativity and emphasizing the organization's commitment to resolution and improvement.

## 5. Building Organizational Resilience

Organizational resilience is a measure of an entity's ability to adapt and recover from challenges. Public Relations contributes significantly to this by fortifying an organization's reputation and relationships. Through strategic planning, training, and continuous monitoring, PR professionals prepare organizations to navigate conflict with ease and emerge stronger on the other side.

## 6. Social Media Management

With the rise of social media as a primary communication channel, PR professionals must be adept at managing online narratives during conflict. Real-time engagement, active listening, and thoughtful response strategies are essential in an environment where misinformation can spread rapidly. By leveraging social media effectively, PR can mitigate reputational damage and foster a more informed and understanding audience.



## Conclusion

In the ever-evolving landscape of conflict management, Public Relations stands as a guardian of organisational reputation and stakeholder relationships. Its role extends far beyond damage control, encompassing proactive measures, strategic communication, and the cultivation of resilience. As organisations continue to navigate the chaos inherent in today's dynamic environment, the importance of a well-executed and strategic PR approach cannot be overstated.

By recognizing the multifaceted nature of conflict and embracing Public Relations as an engine of their strategy, organisations can not only survive tumultuous times but also emerge with strengthened relationships and a more robust public image.

In the end, the role of PR in conflict management is not just about avoiding crisis; it's about building a foundation that enables organizations to thrive in the face of adversity.

### Bio:

Emma Wenani is a Communications Professional (Public Relations, Digital Marketing, Project Management, and Events Management) with over 14 Years of experience working in different capacities at Senior Management Level in mainly Consulting and Media Firms.

She currently oversees the Communication and Consulting units at Global Media Alliance Group as its Chief Director leading her teams in providing strategic and objective advisory services to the clients they work with. The team currently works with and services clients in Telecommunication, Banking, Agriculture, Non-Governmental, Nutrition, Government, and Technology Industries among others.

Ms. Wenani is passionate about communication, personal development, mentorship, and coaching. She often engages in coaching and mentorship programs with young people in areas of career and personal development. She is the Chairperson of the Kenyans in Ghana Association.

She is also an Executive Committee Member of the Executive Women Network (EWN), a non-profit organization of women in senior management and executive positions in private institutions/organizations as well as women entrepreneurs.

She is an avid reader, who enjoys watching football and one of her favorite pastimes is travelling.

Emma graduated with an MBA in Human Resource Management from the University of Ghana in 2014. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree with a combined major in French and Sociology from the University of Nairobi.



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## Public Relations In A Rapidly Changing World. — Chisom Udeoba



We live in a fast-paced world. Everything is constantly evolving, a lot of career paths are springing up daily, and life is no longer as predictable as it used to be because of the growth of tech-based solutions.

This has resulted in a change in the dynamics of different job roles including Public Relations.

Before this time, Public Relations was quite straightforward as practitioners used traditional media like daily newspaper production, TV, and radio programs to promote and maintain the organization's reputation.

Today, the dominance of social media has advanced PR into an era where conversations are not only widespread but instant. The attention span of the audience has reduced and tilted towards fun and engaging content.

Navigating this digital terrain as PR practitioners requires a keen understanding of the online dynamics, active monitoring of discussions, proficient crisis management, and storytelling.

PR practitioners in Nigeria now must recognize the power of storytelling. Our strategies must strike a delicate balance between establishing a connection that transcends facts and figures through storytelling, preserving PR principles, and embracing the innovative tools available.

### **Integrating Storytelling into Business/Organisational PR**

Online platforms, social media, and digital publications have amplified the reach of PR efforts, and more than ever before, business owners and organisations must tap into it.

Through engaging content, press releases, and thought leadership articles, businesses establish themselves as industry leaders.

Integrating storytelling in all of these makes it easier to build trust and loyalty amongst your audience.

### **Here are other benefits of integrating storytelling:**

1. Humanizing the Brand: Storytelling allows businesses to humanize their brand. By sharing stories about the people behind the organization, the success stories of projects, progress reports of activities, challenges faced, and triumphs, you create relatable narratives that evoke empathy and build a genuine connection with your audience. With this, you create connections that build trust and loyalty.

**2. Building Authenticity and Trust:** Authenticity is crucial in PR, especially in these times of rapidly changing narratives. Storytelling provides an avenue to showcase the authentic side of your organization, helping to build trust. When audiences connect with real, relatable stories, it fosters a sense of transparency and credibility.

**3. Engaging Stakeholders:** Storytelling is an effective way to engage stakeholders. Whether it's customers, employees, or investors, stories create a narrative that captivates attention and resonates emotionally. Engaged stakeholders are more likely to become advocates for your brand.

**4. Differentiating in a Crowded Market:** In a competitive landscape, storytelling can be a unique differentiator. A well-crafted narrative sets an organisation apart, helping you stand out in a crowded market. It gives your audience a reason to look out for you, remember, and choose your brand over others.

**6. Content that Resonates Across Platforms:** Storytelling provides versatile content that can be adapted to various platforms. Whether it's through written articles, video content, or multimedia presentations, stories can be tailored to suit different communication channels, maximizing reach and impact.

**Stories also can retain attention for a longer period.**

#### **For Individuals / Personal Brands**

Incorporating storytelling into Personal Brand Public Relations (PR) is a compelling strategy that allows individuals to authentically connect with their audience, differentiate themselves, and build a strong and memorable personal brand.

Storytelling enables individuals to craft compelling narratives about their personal and professional journey, showcasing the real, authentic side of the individual, and showcasing expertise and values.

Through storytelling, individuals can showcase their expertise, values, and unique perspectives. Sharing stories of professional achievements or lessons learned communicates competence while allowing the audience to align with the individual's values.

Summarily, integrating storytelling into personal brand PR and organizational brand PR is about creating a narrative that resonates, differentiates, and authentically represents the individual or organization.

In our rapidly changing world, integrating storytelling into your PR strategy both as an individual and an organization would transform your communication, help build trust, loyalty, and audience engagement which are all required for growth and progress.

#### **Bio:**

Chisom Udeoba, popularly known as The Creative Queen is a Media and Communications professional with over 6 years of experience. She has worked with brands across different industries to initiate and execute numerous successful media campaigns and strategies.

She is the Creative Director of Creatives in Africa, an International Speaker, an Amazon Bestselling Author, and a trainer.





## Harnessing Social Media for Positive Impact: PR Strategies in Conflict Management

\_\_\_\_ Dorcas ADEOLA 



In less than three decades, Social Media has morphed into a pervasive force that has transformed how we communicate, connect, and perceive the world around us. Its global reach, surpassing all human estimations, underscores its profound influence, with the power to effect significant changes, whether positive or negative. Based on data from We Are Social and Hootsuite's digital reports in 2019, more than half of the global population, specifically 56%, is connected to the internet, with 45% engaging on various social media platforms. This figure is projected to potentially double within the next two decades. Social media tools, particularly social networking platforms like Facebook, along with blogs and microblogging sites such as X, have played crucial roles in advancing peace, justice, and conflict prevention initiatives within conflict zones.

While conflicts inherently carry a negative connotation, they are an inevitable aspect of human relations. Driven by our diverse backgrounds, upbringings, and experiences. Conflicts, simply put, arise from disagreements between parties with differing opinions and values,

navigating the complexities of interpersonal connections. What is crucial is not the absence of conflict but rather the adept management of such situations, steering them towards resolutions that restore equilibrium or contribute to societal well-being. Social media has proven to be a valuable tool in conflict management, although it is important to note that it cannot single-handedly prevent or resolve conflicts, nor guarantee justice.

Nevertheless, these platforms offer innovative and impactful avenues for conflict avoidance and prevention. The 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya serves as a compelling example of social media's pivotal role in conflict management. Through platforms like Facebook and blogs such as "Ushahidi," Kenyans disseminated timely information about the ongoing violence and called for its cessation, thereby defusing potential escalation.

This serves as a counterbalance to mainstream media narratives, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of the situation.

Businesses are utilizing social media to manage conflicts effectively; Starbucks is a prime example. When faced with controversies, the company transparently addressed issues, engaging its audience and transforming potential crises into opportunities to reinforce brand values. This strategic approach not only averted crises but also bolstered the company's reputation.

Similarly, Airbnb's actions in politically sensitive regions demonstrate social media's positive impact on conflict management. By communicating commitments to safety, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement, Airbnb effectively navigated challenges and built trust in areas experiencing political unrest.

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**Through social media, citizens have transformed into 'co-journalists,' sharing firsthand perspectives on ongoing conflict situations.**

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Government-led peace campaigns also highlight social media's potential for conflict resolution. These initiatives effectively reached broad audiences, fostering understanding and garnering public support for peaceful endeavors.

In times of conflict, social media serves as an open platform for sharing relevant information and shaping public perspectives. It facilitates two-way communication, enabling individuals to express their views and grievances openly. This dialogue is essential for considering diverse perspectives in conflict resolution.

While leveraging social media, PR professionals must prioritize ethical considerations. Responsible communication, transparency, and respect for diverse perspectives are essential for building and maintaining trust with the audience. It's crucial to recognize that while social media holds immense potential for good, it can also exacerbate conflict situations if not used thoughtfully.

In conclusion, the dynamic interaction between social media and public relations can either exacerbate or ameliorate conflicts.

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In the cases mentioned, social media played a crucial role in managing and resolving conflicts, serving as a significant force in restoring peace to situations that could have spiraled out of control if not handled properly. Its ability to enable quick and widespread intervention allowed for the timely debunking of misinformation, preventing conflicts from escalating and steering public conversation in the desired direction.

However, managing social media during conflicts presents unique challenges for PR professionals. The rapid spread of misinformation, the viral nature of negativity, and the amplification of rumors pose significant obstacles. Navigating this landscape requires a proactive approach to mitigate risks and ensure a positive impact.

When wielded responsibly and strategically, social media becomes a powerful tool for positive change, enabling PR professionals to shape narratives, build trust, and foster understanding even in the most challenging circumstances. Striking a balance and adhering to ethical guidelines is vital to ensure that social media interventions contribute to positive conflict management. As we navigate the digital age, harnessing the power of social media for positive impact presents both a significant challenge and an opportunity for effective conflict management.

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#### Bio:

Dorcas Adeola, a Corporate Communications specialist with experience helping businesses across various industries manage their marketing and communications processes.

# Evaluating the Role of Public Relations in a Workplace Conflict

\_\_\_ Ijeoma Chukwudumebi Oseji



## Introduction

Workplace conflict refers to any tension or disagreement between two or more people that can hinder productivity in an organization.

Conflict happens everywhere, be it at home, at the workplace, or in organizations, but workplace conflict has been an issue of concern because it affects productivity whether directly or indirectly. Workplace conflict is almost inevitable because no two people reason the same way. When differences and disagreements are not properly handled, it may lead to a lack of team cooperation, collaboration, and progress performance. Conflicts can arise from differences in opinions, values, or interests. Conflict ought to be resolved in a timely and professional manner to ensure that the team works together effectively thus minimizing disruption to productivity.

In my article, I will be examining what could lead to this conflict and how public relations could play a vital role in dousing it so that it does not generate a cold war and productivity is not dampened.

## Causes of workplace conflicts

**Workplace conflict could be induced by various factors which are not far-fetched as follows:**

1. **Personality conflict:** Personality clash is one of the most common types of workplace conflicts. These types of conflicts are caused by differences in personality among team members. No two people are exactly alike, be they teammates or supervisors, hence they do not behave or reason the same way. Different employees have unique personalities with differing strengths and weaknesses.

People's personalities differ and that is why we have introverts and extroverts. Introverts prefer working independently and are detail-oriented, while extroverts enjoy collaboration and focus on the bigger picture. Their contrasting personalities may lead to misunderstandings and conflict in decision-making.

People also have different skills, talents, and even flaws. Because they come from different cultural, educational, and geographic backgrounds, everyone has his or her unique way of working. Some people naturally want to override or dominate others because they feel they have a better background and personality than others, and this could spark up conflicts.

2. **Task conflict:** Task-based conflicts could arise when team members rely on each other to complete a task or project. The conflict often sparks off when one person on the team doesn't complete his part of the task on time which then affects another team member's

deliverables and inability to meet with deadline. Task conflict may also arise from discrepancies in allocating resources for the task, conflicting work schedules, insufficient communication, differing methodology/approach of each team member towards achieving the project, unclear job descriptions, and the like. These disagreements could hinder project milestones, deliverables, timelines, and progress.

3. **Leadership conflict:** Every leader has his way of leading his team. Some leaders are directive, while others are inclusive and encourage collaboration within their team. Conflict may abound if leaders within the team are more directive in their leadership style, and do not accommodate the different needs and personalities of your team members.

4. **Work style conflict:** This kind of conflict can occur when people have different working preferences. Instances, where work style conflict can happen, are situations where some people prefer working independently while others prefer





working in collaboration with teammates, or situations where some prefer working for long periods than taking a longer break, while others prefer more frequent, shorter breaks, or situations where some employees are time conscious and finish their tasks early, whereas others wait until the last minute of the deadline to finish their work, or in situations where an employee is highly organized and prefers to plan tasks meticulously in advance while the other employee is more spontaneous. When completing a collaborative task, these differences can be challenging.

#### 5. **Discrimination conflict:**

Workplace conflicts can happen due to discrimination based on age, race, gender, physical characteristics, and religious or political beliefs. If a boss maltreats subordinates without respect, or an employee treats fellow employees the same way, due to discrimination, then there is bound to be a conflict between the two partners involved in the workplace.

6. **Conflict with boss:** In any professional setting, conflicting with one's boss is almost inevitable because different people have different personalities. The conflict may arise from issues on promotions, salary disparity, lack of recognition for achievement, allocating the same responsibility to two employees, preference of one management team to another (favoritism), self-centeredness in making financial decisions, change of task deadlines without proper communication, unfair criticisms, micro-managing an employee which can be frustrating, and the likes. When in conflict with your boss, it could lead to stress and sometimes lead to heated office politics.

### Why conflict resolution is important in the workplace?

1. It eliminates tense and uncomfortable work environments thus increasing productivity and overall morale.
2. It allows teammates to understand each other and creates smoother working relationships

3. It helps teammates understand one another's motives and feelings, which enhances respect among colleagues.

### Managing Workplace Conflict with Public Relations Strategies

According to a study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, conflict is one of the main reasons why employees leave their jobs. To manage conflicts in organizations so that it does not result in a cold war, the following PR strategies should be considered;

1. **Identification:** Understanding is key before a conflict is resolved. Since PR has to do with understanding situations mostly through research before an action takes place, it is necessary that before an employee confronts his boss or his colleague whom he conflicts with, he needs to ascertain if the cause of the conflict is personal issues, professional disagreement or simply a misunderstanding. He also needs to identify his reasons and expectations from the conflict resolution, whether he is seeking an apology or a change.

2. **Collaboration:** PR involves teamwork and cooperation, hence in conflict management, the use of constructive dialogue by the conflicting parties as a means of finding a solution to the problem is a good strategy. The issues are outlined and the interests of both parties are taken into consideration to build a more formidable relationship. In doing this as well, the right time and place for having a constructive dialogue is crucial. It should never be in between a task or in the presence of others.

3. **Negotiation:** This PR strategy requires that the parties involved in the conflict bargain until the satisfaction of the interest of the duo is achieved. In managing this conflict a central point is agreed upon and an agreement is entered into by both parties. If the conflict is between a younger employee and a senior employee, the subordinate should never shout, scold, or paint his boss in a negative light. Calmly negotiating a neutral ground works fine.

4. **Professional Communication:** PR allows for professional communication to convince its audience. Hence, in conflict management, the parties involved should use respectful and assertive communication while communicating grievances. Expressions should be done with confidence without emotions or aggressiveness.

5. **Mediation and Arbitration:** Just as PR is the center point between the media and the public, in conflict management, a neutral person could be invited to resolve the issue as a middleman or as a judge between the conflicting partners. The mediator should ensure reconciliation and peace between the two parties in conflict. His judgments are expected to be accepted by the duo, no matter who wins or loses.

6. **Review and re-assess the solution:** It is important to follow up and re-assess the solution agreed on. This can help the two colleagues maintain a productive, long-lasting solution. This is an acceptable strategy in PR crisis management and, therefore can also be applied to workplace conflict.

### Conclusion:

In conclusion, the workplace ought to be peaceful so that cooperation and teamwork can be accommodated. By employing the strategies outlined in this article, I believe that there will be a transformational change in organisations where conflict is almost like the order of the day with heated office politics, or at least reduced to the barest minimum.

#### Bio:

Ijeoma Chukwudumebi Oseji is a public relations professional with over 10 years of experience in the field. She has a proven track record of delivering excellent results in various aspects of public relations, such as media relations, press releases, feature articles, press briefings, interviews, crisis management, social media, and reputation management. She has worked with diverse clients across different sectors and industries, helping them to communicate effectively with their target audiences and stakeholders. She is passionate about public relations and strives to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and ethics in her work. Aside from being a PR professional, Ijeoma is also an administrator and a Human Resource Manager. She currently works with Coates Brothers West Africa.



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# From Bricks to Bridges: Building Trust in Dynamic Times

— Temidire Bada 

As subtle as the term 'trust' sounds, it is a fragile commodity these days, harder to earn and maintain than ever especially as it plays a huge factor in strengthening communication efforts or poisoning the public mind. In today's dynamic times characterized by rapid technological advancements, trust is a social lubricant, fundamental to functioning in our complex and interdependent society.

Gone are the days when press releases and other forms of traditional media were the sole tools of Public Relations, digital media has now revolutionised mediums of conversation and influenced our interaction. With the rise of misinformation and disinformation, communication must be built on a foundation of transparency, authenticity, and engagement. It's about moving from simply laying bricks of information, to constructing bridges of trust with stakeholders.

## Why is Trust Important?

Trust is the bedrock of any successful relationship and a metric to measure success. The need for trust is imperative on two levels. First, to satisfy that practitioners are expected to be authentic and credible. Second, trust is critical to public relations' primary purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders on whom the organization's success depends. In other words, trust is perception properly managed. Traditionally, trust was built on the foundation of consistency and reliability. However, digitalisation has not only transformed the medium of communication but has also reshaped the nature of trust.

This can be attributed to:  
Increased public skepticism  
Information overload and misinformation  
Rise of digital deception  
Social and political polarisation  
Erosion of privacy  
Democratization of content creation -

With this reality and limiting voices, it has become challenging for brands to stand out, capture their audience's attention, and more importantly, sustain the attention. This is significant to new businesses that might have diligently marketed their products and amassed social media following, but soon realised less than 5% sales and revenue. Investors and clients need to trust the business management to invest, likewise, clients require credibility purchased with trust to bank on the company's services and products.

Understanding the loop distrust creates isn't enough, the next step is to define how to build on the bricks of connection to develop trust. They include:

### Effective Communication:

Communication can only be said to be effective when the message transmitted, is well-understood and well-received by all parties. Effective communication must not only be emotionally resonant and concise but also purposeful. At the heart of purposeful communication lies the ability to create a clear and authentic message; crafting narratives that reflect values, vision, and goals.

Therefore, brands must proactively engage with their audience through the most effective medium or channels, employ storytelling techniques, and prioritise active listening to audience needs. The increasing prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) fueled by the evolution of digital communication and modern interaction has in no small measure clouded judgment and bred sensationalism. A single misstep, poorly worded tweet, or unaddressed negative review can swiftly erode years of painstakingly built trust. Therefore, communication activities must be treated with purpose, transparency, and responsibility.

**Data and Analytics:** Credibility and Authenticity isn't just a buzzword; it's quantifiable. Strengthening your claims with data doesn't only put brands in a good light. It erases scepticism, gives room for visualization, proves investment fuels transparency, authenticity, and empathy, and improves targeted messaging by understanding the audience's values and tailoring your messaging accordingly.

**Community Building:** Regardless of society's increasing sense of individualism, people are craving community now more than ever. Community relations involve nurturing and maintaining positive relationships between businesses or organizations and their local communities. This community thrives on engagement, interaction, and a sense of belonging. They are also instrumental in increasing brand loyalty, understanding customers, and building brand trust and goodwill.





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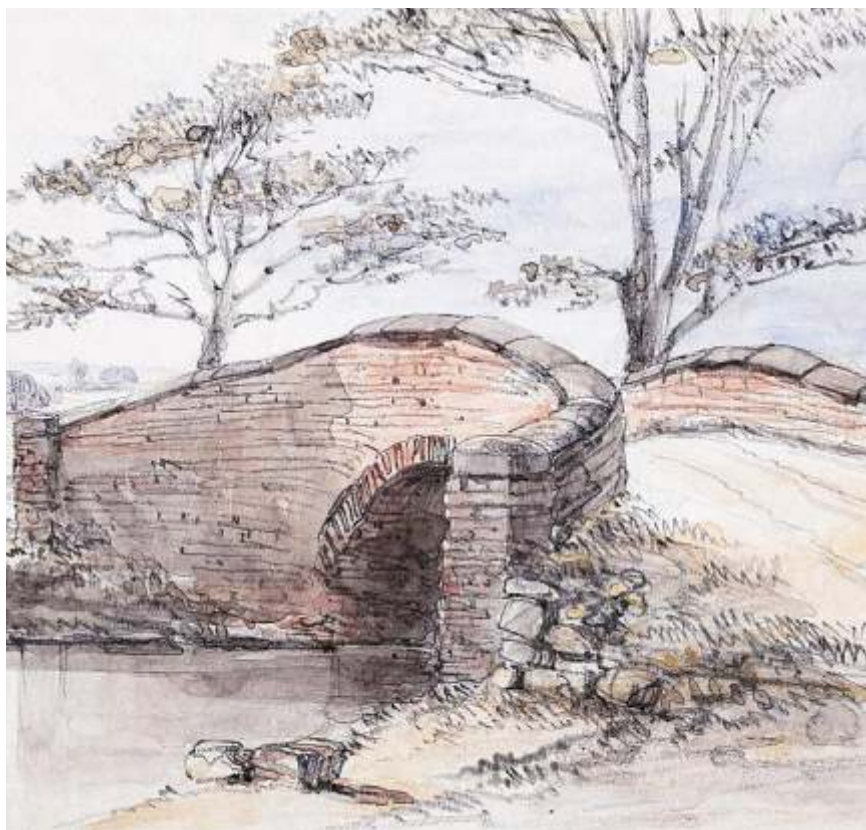
### Partnering With Influencers:

**Brand trust hinges on genuine connection, collaboration, and social capital. By collaborating with individuals who possess authentic voices and established relationships with target audiences, brands can foster trust in ways that feel organic and meaningful. Working with credible influencers who align with brand values can help you reach a wider audience and build trust with your target market.**

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In a world yearning for authenticity and the public seeming loss of confidence in institutions, it is possible to build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their audience which in the end, enhances growth at the bottom line. At the centre of this lies the power of public relations which is both strategic and planned; an exhilarating blend of storytelling and strategy, human psychology, and business management.

Conclusively, we can agree that trust must not be an afterthought but a force that should inspire work ethics and efforts. This will further teach us to embrace vulnerability in planning, practise active listening, build genuine connections, not just fleeting impressions, and prioritise empathy in communications, and human connections over mere transactions. This way, we can mitigate crises, and champion societal development - slowly but long term.



#### Bio:

Temidire Bada is a Public Relations Associate at NOVVA Media and Communications, where she leverages her diverse experience in corporate communications, media relations, event planning, crisis communication, and digital PR to craft impactful narratives that shape perceptions and drive positive change.

Outside work, Temidire is passionate and involved in community development and environmental sustainability initiatives. When she's not strategizing the next impactful campaign, she is keeping up with breaking news in music and politics or binging Game of Thrones.

# Proactive PR: Anticipating and Managing Conflicts through Strategic Communications

Ibilola Ogunnaike 



Disputes are short-term disagreements that can be easily resolved through dialogues. Folberg and Taylor (2008) posit that disputes are natural elements of human interaction involving incompatible interests and goals, where effective resolution requires finding common ground and understanding. A legal publication by New South Wales classifies dispute types into civil cases and criminal cases, but these are disputes typically resolved in a courtroom.

Not all disputes are resolved in the courtroom. As long as humans co-exist, arguments are bound to arise, requiring some sort of resolution through principled negotiations that aim for mutual gain rather than win-lose outcomes. More often than not, long unresolved disputes transcend into conflicts.

Conflicts are usually deep-rooted issues, resistant to negotiations and requiring resolutions like mediation, arbitration, or litigation. Shonholtz (1986) defines conflicts as those issues that lack a legitimate, reliable, transparent, non-arbitrary forum for the peaceful settlement of differences.

Kenneth Burke (2005) in his analysis submits that conflicts are communicative events, involving the exchange of messages, negotiation of meanings, and attempts to resolve differences through communication.

Certain elements are consistent with all conflicts. Some of them include a perceived incompatibility of interests, goals, values, or resources among individuals, groups, or entities; a divergence of interests; behavioural differences or social backgrounds; power tussles and many times, communication breakdowns.

Disputes and conflicts are inevitable in human interactions, particularly in organisations. Every public relations practitioner will be faced with disputes or conflicts both internally and externally. But how do we resolve them? The role of strategic communications in resolving conflicts cannot be overemphasised.

Strategic communication is a useful tool in resolving conflicts and disputes. It is the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission (James Grunig, Wilson, 2021).

From a public relations perspective, strategic communications is the deliberate planning, execution, and evaluation of programs that influence public opinion (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 1994). Conflicts are inevitable and strategic communication is essential in diffusing likely conflicts. It is therefore important for Public Relations practitioners to be equipped with conflict management strategies and proactive insights to anticipate and manage conflicts.

Strategic communications go beyond routine messaging and tactics. It should be thoughtful and well-planned to influence perceptions, behaviours, and certain attitudes. A good communications plan should have a specific audience in mind undergirded by a comprehensive audience analysis objective, a compelling narrative with appropriate communication channels (print, online, broadcast, or social media); a crisis management plan, and an avenue for feedback.

Strategic communications can be used to resolve conflicts through relationship building, open and empathetic communication, stakeholder engagement, reputation management, and proper media management.

## Anticipating Conflicts Using MTN Nigeria's Valentine's Day Crisis as a Case Study.

On 14th February, 2023 MTN Nigeria had a network freeze for the majority of the day and many subscribers could not access voice and data services for some hours. This came only a few hours after the social media chatter and hilarious comments on the telco bromance with Airtel. For context, MTN and Airtel exchanged 'love notes' on Instagram. A day that had been going so smoothly for MTN ended with needing to issue a statement and resolve a mini crisis.

What did we learn from how MTN managed the situation? It is important to note the company swiftly released an official statement, taking ownership of the situation, being empathetic and truthful about the down-time and this swayed public trust favourably.

As public relations practitioners, having a crisis management team is essential. Organisations have also evolved from mere reactive crisis management strategies to preemptive strategies such as staying ahead of the curve, identifying emerging trends in the industries, likely challenges (in the case of a telecommunications company, its downtime), and engaging relevant stakeholders, amongst others.

Foresight, early detection, and preemptive measures are some of the proactive ways practitioners can mitigate potential issues before they escalate into a crisis. If a crisis occurs, clear and sincere communication to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome should be the goal.

### Conclusion

In a world where news travels at the speed of light, organisations must be attuned to the ever-changing landscape of conflicts. At the heart of proactive PR is strategic communication planning which involves a meticulous assessment of potential risks, vulnerabilities, and areas of concern.

By understanding the landscape an organisation operates, PR professionals can craft communication strategies that not only address current challenges but also preemptively counteract future issues. This planning includes scenario analysis, stakeholder mapping, and key messaging development.

**Proactive PR requires constant vigilance. Monitoring social media, industry trends, and other relevant channels enables organisations to detect early signs of potential conflicts. By employing advanced analytics and media monitoring tools, PR professionals can identify conversations, sentiments, and emerging issues, allowing for timely intervention before a situation escalates.**



### Bio:

Ibilola is a digital marketer and a budding public relations professional. She is passionate about communicating complex ideas in simple comprehensible terms with the intended audience in mind.

Her background in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Lagos has provided her with a useful understanding of human psychology and how that influences communication.

She currently works at BHM Group, a leading public relations and reputation management consultancy in Africa. She is one of the consultants managing the MTN corporate account. She has successfully managed diverse marketing communications campaigns that have contributed to the growing status of MTN Nigeria. She has also worked on global industry projects like World PR Day 2023.

Ibilola is passionate about data-driven public relations strategy. Her career goal is to become one of the one percent of public relations practitioners in Nigeria and be acknowledged globally for her contribution to the practice.

When she's not creating public relations and digital marketing strategies, she's catching up with her friends or re-watching an old series.





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# CRAFTING A TENACIOUS IMAGE: STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS IN ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AMIDST CONFLICT

— Amarachi Ndukwe



The world has gradually moved from the traditional bazaar to a more complex digital landscape. Furthermore, the advancement in technology constantly grows by the day. Businesses, corporations, organizations, start-ups, and even entrepreneurs have jumped on this train of taking what they do online. The virtual landscape, no doubt, is another world on its own. Someone is saying something about your brand whether you know it or not. But you want to make sure what they say or perceive about your brand is consistent with your brand's image and what you put out online for the public to see. This is what Online Reputation Management does. It is intentionally crafting and maintaining a positive image of a brand online.

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**A negative online reputation can damage the credibility of a business or an individual and leave a negative impact on their trust. It is therefore essential for PR professionals to be aware of these tools and how they can be implemented in times of conflict to maintain a positive online reputation.**

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Ric Edelman once said, "The lesson you have to learn is to be aware of the incredible power of social media and the dangers of reacting to news that you haven't verified. In today's digital landscape, it takes time to build a positive reputation for a brand but it can also take seconds to tarnish such an image. This is why every organization needs a crisis communication plan and, most importantly, needs to make use of strategies to maintain its online reputation.

here are specific strategies that make up building a positive online reputation for brands and as PR professionals, it is essential to be aware of these tools and know how to use them to prevent conflict. SEO - negative comments or reviews can appear in the search results causing damage to an individual's or a business's credibility. It is therefore essential to use SEO-Based Online Reputation strategies to promote positive content.



This can be done by identifying negative search results/keywords associated with your brand, creating high-quality content (press releases, blog posts, etc.) to promote your brand, and also creating backlinks to promote your content.

**CONTENT:** Create and promote high-quality & positive content that showcases an individual or business's strength and expertise that will help build a positive reputation. Promoting this kind of content can reach a wider audience and communicate the brand's value. The trick here is to create high-quality content, especially thought leadership type, and share/promote it.

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** One I'm most passionate about because it is a very powerful tool for us as PR professionals and also an integral part of our lives. No doubt, the number of Social media users increases by the day plus news travels fast on social media. Research shows that the number of social media users globally grew from 4.72 billion in January 2023 to 5.04 billion in January 2024. Also, the average daily social media usage of internet users worldwide amounted to 151 minutes per day in 2023. You've probably heard the saying, "Social media never forgets; negative news travels faster." You can effectively manage your brand's reputation via social media by monitoring activities on your desired social media platforms then have a social media strategy on how to engage with your audience and respond promptly to inquiries and comments from your audience.

**REVIEWS:** This is another way to help maintain a positive online reputation for individuals and businesses. You can manage and monitor reviews about the brand using a reviews website. Firstly, identify these websites e.g., Google Reviews, Google Business Profile, Yelp, Yellow Pages, TripAdvisor, etc. Secondly, after identifying the desired website of your choice then monitor the reviews, positive or negative. Respond to the negative reviews immediately and professionally. Also, encourage satisfied clients and customers to give a good review. It'll go a long way in crafting a positive image for the brand.

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**Now that we are aware of these tools, how then can we use them effectively as PR professionals to build a positive image and also use them to manage conflict? Every lifetime of an organization will experience conflict in one small way or another. The way it is handled and the aftermath matter in the long run. It will determine whether the situation will be remembered for good or bad.**

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First of all, it is advisable to assess how your brand is perceived online. The world is watching and carefully listening. Do a brand audit on your brand's online reputation. Secondly, know your audience. Study them and keep track of the social media networks/platforms they use. Thirdly, promote high-quality content especially thought leadership pieces, press releases, and blog posts. This will give them an idea of your brand messaging and values. Fourthly, actively engage them by responding to both good and negative reviews. Lastly, monitor your online reputation. Look for pitfalls and gaps and look for proactive measures to close them. In times of conflict, reach out to your audience via their desired channel and communicate transparently. Keeping quiet in times like this will make them interpret the situation in a manner that best suits them. The overall goal is to communicate promptly and clearly. Remember, how people see your business or organization will determine its success and patronage in the long run.

**Bio:**

Amarachi is a Strategic communication professional with over five years of experience in media, public relations, and brand management. She is passionate about creating and implementing effective communication strategies that drive business growth and increase brand awareness. She has a proven track record of developing and executing successful communication campaigns resulting in increased media coverage, improved brand reputation, and increased stakeholder engagement.

She is committed to helping organizations achieve their goals by leveraging effective communication tactics that resonate with their audience.





## “S.O.R.R.Y” — Victoria Chukwunekwe

In the world of words, disagreements easily get tangled like a web, and they sometimes grow into conflicts that are like storms. But in the middle of all this, there is a little hero called “S.O.R.R.Y”, a potent force that sweeps through; turning storms into calm seas and transforming tangles into a clear path of understanding. Far beyond its five letters, it is the silent hero in the stories companies tell; it is the **Sincerity** that opens the door, the **Ownership** that clears the air, the **Repair** that rebuilds bridges, the **Respect** that fosters understanding, and the **Yielding** that paves the way for compromise. It is not merely about admitting faults; it is acknowledging mistakes and further proposing solutions whilst showing respect. In a world where some may question the impact of apologies, the truth remains- SORRY is PR's silent superhero; wielding the strength to ensure that the echo of understanding resonates louder than the noise of discord.

In the realm of Public Relations, where every word holds weight and conflicts are like viruses eroding relationships, strategic apologies act as potent antibodies, not just healing the wounds of miscommunication but fortifying the immune system of trust, ensuring a resilient and lasting connection. It's no surprise that PR and conflicts often go hand in hand, thereby creating a barrier to effective communication. This issue is exacerbated by some organizations hesitating to admit mistakes, perhaps due to misplaced pride. Similarly, clients may also resist offering or receiving apologies, contributing to a breakdown in communication effectiveness. This reluctance, akin to a stubborn knot, tightens the tangle, hindering the potential for genuine understanding and collaborative resolution.




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**In the intricate dance of conflicts, both parties are architects of their narrative; therefore both parties must embrace open dialogue and mutual understanding. A harmonious resolution isn't just a compromise; it's a shared commitment to safeguarding reputations, nurturing partnerships, and upholding the integrity of the narrative – a collective investment in the sustained success and credibility of all involved. It is safe to conclude that when businesses shy away from acknowledging mistakes or extending apologies, it doesn't just stay in the business realm. This reluctance not only impacts companies but also permeates into interpersonal and societal dynamics, spilling over into real-world scenarios and potentially contributing to broader issues and disruptions.**

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A seemingly minor hiccup can amplify significant consequences, underscoring the interconnected nature of professional communication and its potential implications on a global scale. As these conflicts ripple globally, one wonders: "Who can untangle them and bring everyone back on the same page in this big world of communication?"

In situations where these conflicts go beyond the four walls of buildings and even cross borders, using inclusive communication becomes crucial for finding common ground and solving problems on a worldwide scale. This approach not only mends fractured relations but also builds a foundation for global cooperation and respect.

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**As we navigate through the twists and turns of these challenges, organisations must create a culture that's always ready to learn and adapt. This means being open to new ideas and ways of doing things, so the companies can stay strong even when faced with unexpected problems.**

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By fostering this kind of environment, organizations not only tackle conflicts effectively but also become better at preventing them in the first place. It's like having a toolkit that helps fix things when they break and, at the same time, keeps everything running smoothly. In the world of global communication, the strength lies not only in fixing what is broken but in the wisdom to learn from it, ensuring that every challenge becomes an opportunity for growth.

Needless to say, cultivating a workplace culture geared towards adaptability and continuous learning inherently implies a company's commitment to valuing diverse ideas. Valuing diverse ideas means recognizing and appreciating the unique perspectives, experiences, and insights that individuals from various backgrounds bring to the table. It involves creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels heard and respected, fostering a culture that not only tolerates differences but actively seeks them out.

Extending the practice of valuing diverse ideas to clients means recognizing and appreciating their unique perspectives and insights. It involves creating an inclusive partnership where the client's input is not only respected but actively sought, even when the ideas may initially seem unconventional or challenging to understand. In the realm of public relations, a client relationship that values diverse ideas not only enhances strategic planning but also ensures that campaigns resonate with a broader audience, capturing the varied perspectives present in the target market. This inclusive approach fosters stronger client relationships and more effective communication strategies.

In conclusion, it is evident that S.O.R.R.Y is not confined to mere linguistic expression; rather, it embodies an attitude—a profound commitment to humility, accountability, and the sincere desire for resolution. It transcends the boundaries of a simple word, evolving into a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution that constitutes a holistic and transformative strategy. It encapsulates the acknowledgment that conflicts are not merely resolved through words but through the genuine adoption of these principles.

Embracing S.O.R.R.Y as an art, a skill to be honed, highlights its significance as a fundamental aspect that PR companies must prioritize and excel in to sculpt a landscape of communication defined by openness, empathy, and a continuous dedication to building relationships based on trust to ensure its reputation stands tall.

#### Bio:

A versatile PR professional, skilled writer, and innovative content creator holding a Master's degree in Communications. Victoria Chukwunekwe is a strategic storyteller dedicated to amplifying brand narratives through impactful communication.

She is passionate about crafting compelling content that resonates across diverse platforms and is ready to leverage my expertise to elevate brands and engage audiences effectively.



# PR Beyond Publicity: The Role of PR in Conflict Management

\_\_\_\_ Hope Idume-David



Public Relations (PR) is commonly associated with managing publicity, social media virality, media engagement, TV interviews, full-page publications in newspapers, and radio engagement. However, beyond publicity, PR encompasses the art of building relationships and fostering communication between an organization and its stakeholders. It involves managing perceptions, shaping narratives, and strategically influencing public opinion to create a favorable environment for the organization's goals and objectives.

In today's dynamic landscape, PR professionals serve as frontline defenders, skilled at navigating conflicts before they escalate into full-blown crisis. Understanding the distinction between conflict and crisis is crucial in deploying effective strategies to maintain stability and safeguard reputations.

## Conflict vs. Crisis: Understanding the Difference

Conflict, often referred to as "quiet wars," are simmering tensions that exist within or between organizations, communities, or individuals. These conflicts can arise due to differing opinions, competition, or external pressures. Left unchecked, conflicts have the potential to escalate into crisis, which are characterized by heightened uncertainty, negative publicity, and significant reputational damage.

In contrast, crisis are events or situations that pose an immediate threat to an organization's operations, reputation, or stakeholders. Crises demand swift and decisive action to mitigate the damage and restore trust.

## Case Study: #BanksWars (2018)



In 2018, Sterling Bank triggered the #BanksWars conversation on Twitter, garnering public excitement, attention, and engagement. However, what began as an awareness strategy almost led to a crisis. After Sterling Bank posted a creative tweet "shading" other banks, Union Bank, Access Bank, and First Bank responded with counter tweets.



As the conversation progressed, concerns arose. Nairametrics gathered that a certain bank reported the tweet to the Central Bank of Nigeria after declining to get involved in the tweet banter. Subsequently, the Central Bank sent Sterling Bank a letter requesting that the bank immediately "pull down the post from its Twitter handle, write an unreserved apology, through the same medium, to all banks whose logos and buildings you used in the advert and explain within twenty-four hours why regulatory sanctions should not be imposed on your bank"



The CBN claimed this was "an attempt" by Sterling Bank to "exploit the power of social media to demarket other banks". They also claimed this violated section 44 of the Banking and Other Financial Institution Act (BOFIA).

Contrary to the buzz generated from the tweet the CBN claims that the post "generated negative comments for the entire banking industry."





This escalation, however properly handled before turning into a full-blown crisis, underscores the need for organizations to carefully consider the potential consequences of their social media activities and highlights the importance of effective conflict management strategies in PR.

#### PR Strategies for Conflict Management:

**1. Proactive Communication:** Open and transparent communication is key to preventing conflicts from escalating. Establishing clear channels of communication with stakeholders fosters trust and allows for the early identification of potential issues.

Proactive communication involves developing comprehensive crisis communication plans, providing regular updates, and actively engaging with stakeholders on social media platforms.

**2. Stakeholder Engagement:** Regularly engaging with stakeholders helps identify and address concerns before they escalate. Actively listening to stakeholders' feedback and concerns enables organizations to proactively manage conflicts and build stronger relationships.

**3. Risk Assessment and Monitoring:** Conducting regular risk assessments and monitoring external factors allows for early detection of potential conflicts. By identifying and addressing risks proactively, organizations can prevent conflicts from escalating into crises.

**4. Strategic Planning:** Developing comprehensive crisis management plans that outline protocols and procedures for addressing conflicts is essential. These plans should include strategies for swift response, effective communication, and stakeholder management.

PR plays a critical role in conflict management, serving as a proactive force in identifying, addressing, and resolving tensions before they escalate into crises.

By deploying strategies that prioritize open communication, stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, and strategic planning, organizations can effectively manage conflicts and safeguard their reputations in an increasingly volatile world.

#### Bio:

Hope is a seasoned professional in public relations and marketing communications, with a proven track record across diverse industries. Her belief that the world is her oyster fuels her drive to achieve anything she sets her mind to.

In her professional journey, she excels in researching and identifying strategic partnerships for clients, crafting effective strategies to achieve business objectives. Her expertise extends to the building and maintenance of valuable relationships, ensuring engagement that aligns seamlessly with client expectations. Notably, she has successfully developed compelling proposals for strategic partnerships and meticulously built directories for media, communities, and key audiences, showcasing her proficiency in navigating the dynamic landscape of strategic communications.

When not crafting strategic communication plans, she serves as a social media manager and strategist, weaving compelling stories to propel brands toward their goals, enhance reach, and increase awareness.

As an academic writer, she specializes in researching and writing about communication concepts and trends. Beyond academia, you'll find her on Medium or Instagram, sharing insights on love, women's rights, visibility and empowerment, relationships, navigating life as a young person, and whatever captivates her interest at the moment.

Hope is enthusiastic about exploring global opportunities in corporate communications, marketing across various industries, and engaging in academic research on communication. Connect with her via [hopeidume@gmail.com](mailto:hopeidume@gmail.com).



# **Global Directory of Nigeria Women Owned/Led PR Firms**



So.Me Solutions Firm		Lagos, Nigeria. London, USA
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Elizabeth Osho	
Email Address	calypsowills2@gmail.com	
Website	www.somesolutionsco.com	
<b>1. Digital marketing 2. Content development 3.Client visibility</b> (SoMe) is an international Communications Agency that crafts communications for building, maintaining and managing client reputations and visibility. Their key strengths lie in content development and content dissemination and marketing, which is why they are known for telling client's stories uniquely.		

M.A.E Management Consultancy Group		London, United Kingdom
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Gracey Mae	
Email Address	vanessaezenwafor2015@gmail.com	
Website	https://mae-mcg.com/	
<b>Music Public Relations, Marketing, Digital Amplification, Data Analytics and Insights, PR Project Activation</b>		
Mae Management Consultancy Group (MAE) is a boutique agency that specializes in delivering music label services for artists from Africa and the Diaspora.		

Stage Africa Media and Advisory		Lagos, Nigeria.
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Omotoyosi Ajayi	
Email Address	omotoyosihelen@gmail.com	
Website	www.stageafrica.com	
Media Relations, Crisis Communications, Stakeholder Engagement		
Stage Africa Media and Business Advisory is a dynamic firm at the forefront of driving impactful marketing, public relations, and advisory solutions across Nigeria and Africa.		

Reign Digital		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Kafilat Salisu
Email Address		Reign.digital1@gmail.com
Website		www.reigndigital.org
Media Relations		
Media Relations		

PRO ALLY		Nigeria.
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Tunbosun Afolayan	
Email Address	proally.org@gmail.com	
Website	www.proallyworld.com	
<b>Simplified Science Communication, External Relations, Strategic Business Communication</b> We are a boutique Communication, Public Relations, and Stakeholder Management firm, partnering with future-forward organizations for strategic cross-sectoral business delivery. Our focus industries are Energy, S.T.E.M., and related sectors.		

Brand Spark		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Efe Obiomah
Email Address		hello@thebrandsparks.com
Website		https://www.thebrandsparks.com
<b>Product Launches, Reputation Management And Social Impact Campaigns.</b>		
Brand Spark is a public relations firm offering contemporary solutions to forward-thinking people and organisations. Our mission is to build reputable and purposeful brands that have strong relationships with those that matter so that they can be profitable.		

AT3 Resources		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Tosin Adefeko
Email Address		info@at3resources.com
Website		https://at3resources.com/
<b>Public Relations Consultancy (Strategic Communications, Crisis Communications, Digital and Social Media PR), Media Consultancy (Media Intervention, Training, Listening and Monitoring) &amp; Podcast Service</b>		
AT3 Resources is a brand growth agency. We design comms & create movements that elevate the brand experience.		

Susamsss PR Comms. Ltd		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Dr. Ahmadu Fatimah-Binta	
Email Address	s5prcommLtd@gmail.com	
Website	www.susamssscomms.org	
<b>1. Health-care 2. Event management 3. ICT</b>		
Susamsss PR Comms. Ltd was started in 2012. We specialize in training faculties, event planning & management, crisis management, reputation & brand management, strategic policy formulation, corporate social responsibility and sustainable economic growth through health care and agriculture.		

Chenist Communications		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Mary Rufus/Ekene Ajayi	
Email Address	ekene@chenistcomms.com	
Website	https://chenistcomms.com/	
<b>Media Relations, Consumer PR and Issues/Crisis Communications &amp; Management</b>		
Chenist Communications, a subsidiary of Chenist Consulting Services Limited, was established with the aim of providing excellent and first-class marketing communications, perception and reputation management services to corporates and brands within the public and private sectors.		

Ligera Digital Agency		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Adaolisa Onwuebe Chidinma	
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Website	https://ligeradigital.com/	
<b>Brand Management, Marketing &amp; Digital Media</b>		
Adaolisa is currently the Lead PR strategist & Co-founder at Ligera Digital Agency, a strategic brand communications and 360 agency specializing in integrated marketing and communications solutions for brands.		

Reneé PR Agency		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Joyce Imiegha
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Website		www.reneepr.com
Media Relations, Consumer PR and Issues/Crisis Communications & Management		
Storytelling, Thought Leadership & Crisis Communications		

Kora & Hive PR		Lagos, Nigeria
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Website		www.koraandhive.com
<b>Media Relations, Personal Branding &amp; Executive Profiling, Strategic Events</b>		
Kora & Hive is a result-oriented PR & communications agency focused on delivering stellar campaigns, strategies, & innovative approaches to B2B & B2C businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa.		

<b>Reneé PR Agency</b>	Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Joyce Imiegha
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<b>Media Relations, Consumer PR and Issues/Crisis Communications &amp; Management</b>	
Storytelling, Thought Leadership & Crisis Communications	

The Lifestyle Brand Consult Agency		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Obianuju Lilian Ikegbune	
Email Address	thelifestylebrandconsult@gmail.com	
Website	www.tlbcagency.com	
<b>Media Relations, Strategic Communications and Reputation management</b>		
The Lifestyle Brand Consult Agency – TLBC Agency is a Boutique Public Relations and Brand Communications Agency that Strategically and Creatively elevates Brand image.		



The Giant Creative Brand		Lagos, Nigeria.
Name of Founder/Firm Lead	Oluwabukola Jegede	
Email Address	www.thegiantcreative.org	
Website	www.somesolutionsco.com	
<b>Branding, Digital Marketing, Product Design</b>		
Recognizing that a brand is more than just a name, The Giant Creative Brand's mission is to offer comprehensive, result-oriented media development strategies tailored to the unique needs of brands, regardless of their size.		

Flagscale PR		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Fatihah Ayinde
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Website		www.flagscalepr.com
<b>Media Relations - Strategic Communications - Internal PR Communications</b>		
Flagscale PR (FSPP) is committed to delivering data-driven, people-centric PR solutions tailored to the unique communications needs of African SMEs towards business success and an accelerated AfCFTA progression		

GLG Communications		Lagos, Nigeria.
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Omawumi Ogbe
Email Address		avjoyeliana@gmail.com
Website		www.glgcommunication.com
<b>Branding and Positioning, Media Relations, Reputation Management</b>		
GLG Communications is an essentially creative agency. We specialize in implementing solutions and initiatives that engender effective linkage between a brand and its target market. Our goal is to drive the perception of brands in a way that is true to one's identity and clear to its people.		

Winstarbel Communications Ltd		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Thelma Okoh
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Website		www.winstarbel.com
Crisis communication, Reputation Management and Advocacy		
Winstarbel Communications Ltd is IMC firm with specialisation in advocacy, brands management, storytelling, content creation and management, training		

Tooki Media Agency		Lagos, Nigeria
Name of Founder/Firm Lead		Elizabeth Igwe
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Website		www.tookimedia.com
<b>Media Relations, Brand Communications, Integrated Marketing Communications</b>		
We are a global public relations and marketing agency for corporate brands and nonprofits.		

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## UPS in Crisis: A Masterclass in Conflict Management and Communication. \_\_\_\_ Gemiene Mueni



In the ever-evolving landscape of professional interactions, conflicts are bound to happen. From high-profile PR disasters, we have learned that hiding, deflecting, or issuing insincere statements is not effective. Stakeholders want to see you take responsibility, communicate about future prevention measures, and understand the role your organization played or is perceived to have played. As Max Lucado said, "Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional." Any sharp disagreement or collision of interests and ideas can be defined as a conflict.

When we think of conflict, we often fear the worst. We tend to think that it will lead to confrontation, crisis, and irreparable damage to relationships. In Chinese, the symbol for crisis is made up of two words: "Wei," meaning "danger," and "ji," meaning "opportunity." In a conflict situation, great care is needed due to the risk of creating a disaster. However, it also presents an opportunity for improvement. Recognising that conflict is an opportunity for inquiry, learning, and problem-solving supports our intention of working toward a win/win outcome. The first step is to value the humanity of the person with whom we are in conflict.

In our line of work, the real work begins before a crisis hits. The PR team must make decisions for the long term and stay focused on priorities. The first hours of any crisis are the most critical. How the company responds initially sets the tone for the rest of the crisis period. That is why advanced research is so crucial. Message testing is fundamental to effective communications, and must be done before a crisis hits.

Throughout the history of corporations, there have been certain events that stand out as defining moments. These events have tested the resilience and adaptability of organizations and the story of United Parcel Service (UPS) in 1997 is one such narrative, a chapter that underscores the crucial role of public relations in conflict management. UPS, a global transportation and logistics company, faced an unprecedented challenge in 1997. As negotiations with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the union representing UPS employees, unfolded, the stage was set for a clash that would test the mettle of the company and its communication strategies.

The negotiation table was set for discussions on wages, benefits, job security, and control of pensions for UPS employees within the union. As negotiations unfolded, it became clear that the stakes were higher than ever, with both sides entrenched in their positions. So how did UPS etch itself in history in conflict management? Let's take a look.

### 1. The Art of Communication

In the delicate dance of conflict, communication becomes the anchor that can either heighten or ease tensions. UPS, a privately held company with limited public relations resources, found itself grappling with the overwhelming challenge of managing global attention. The Teamsters, on the other hand, orchestrated a well-coordinated media blitz, utilizing television, radio, print, and even the emerging power of the Internet.

**Lesson learned:** communication is not just about conveying information but strategically framing key messages. The Teamsters' focus on 'Part-time America won't work' resonated with the media, shaping public perception and steering the narrative in their favour. UPS, in contrast, struggled to communicate effectively in the crucial early hours of the strike.



## 2. Long-Term Vision

In the moment of conflict, UPS remained steadfast in its commitment. Despite the adversarial nature of the negotiation, the company opted not to attack the union leadership or its employees. This strategic decision aimed to preserve the long-term relationship with its workforce, recognizing the pivotal role of UPS drivers as the face of the company.

**Lesson learned:** crisis communication is not just about winning the immediate battle but safeguarding long-term relationships and corporate reputation. Recognizing that conflict is an opportunity for inquiry, learning, and problem-solving supports our intention of working toward a win/win outcome

## 3. Preparation and Adaptability

UPS had a crisis communication plan, but the strike revealed gaps in their preparedness. The importance of testing messages before and during a crisis became apparent, emphasizing the need for proactive measures in the face of uncertainty. Moreover, the company acknowledged a slower response in utilizing digital platforms compared to the Teamsters.

**Lesson learned:** the real work in crisis management begins before the crisis hits, necessitating continuous preparedness, adaptability, and the integration of digital communication channels. The heartbeat of effective public relations lies in the commitment to perpetual improvement, aiming to be better than the previous day.

## 4. Humanizing the Issue:

The Teamsters successfully humanized the issue by showcasing unhappy UPS workers, especially those with part-time employment.

**Lesson learned:** UPS learned that the key to successful conflict management is to recognize the humanity of those involved. By valuing the people in conflict, we can create a respectful and productive dialogue that leads to a win/win outcome.



## 5. Continuous Improvement:

Reflecting on the experience, UPS acknowledged that they could have done a better job with communication during the strike. The realization led to a commitment to continuous improvement, emphasizing the importance of learning from past experiences to strengthen future crisis responses.

*"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."* - Maya Angelou

The UPS saga of 1997 remains an important lesson in crisis communication and conflict management. As UPS evolved, it embraced these lessons, becoming a stronger and better-prepared company, demonstrating that strategic communication and principled crisis management are indispensable in navigating the tumultuous waters of industrial relations.

### Bio:

Gemiene Mueni is a PR & Communications consultant with over 3+ years of experience in the industry, she is passionate about helping brands tell remarkable stories through earned, owned, shared, and paid media. When it comes to PR, Gemiene believes that Passion, Creativity & Innovation are key; that's why she loves brainstorming fun, innovative campaigns geared for change that engages audiences and leaves a remarkable mark. With a keen understanding of the ever-changing media landscape, Gemiene has a proven track record of securing high-profile media coverage for her clients. She has worked with a variety of remarkable brands, from D&R studio, Sauti Sol, Inua Dada, SHOFCO, Everstrong Capital, Jambo Travel house, and many others, helping them build brand awareness, launch new products, and manage crises. When she's not busy crafting PR strategies, Gemiene is trying out new baking recipes and drinks, spending time with her family & friends, or re-watching her favourite series. She's a Full-time gladiator. With her on your team, you can rest assured that your brand will be in good hands - and you'll probably have a lot of fun along the way!

## Public Relations in Conflict Management

Chukwu Joy



When you hear "conflict," what pops into your head? Guns, wars, arguments, clashes? Think of conflict like a big disagreement. If conflict were a person, they'd probably have a rap sheet a mile long, accused by different folks of all sorts of things. Despite its bad reputation, conflict is just something that happens, often when we least expect it.

Brands, like people, deal with conflict too. Nowadays, with the fast-paced digital world, they're even more likely to run into it. But don't worry, that's where public relations comes in handy. Public relations acts like a handy tool for managing conflict. It breaks down barriers and turns conflict into an opportunity to strengthen relationships.



In the world of public relations, managing conflict is a big deal. It's about understanding both sides of the story and finding the right words to smooth things over. Good communication is key here. Without it, conflict can quickly spiral out of control, risking a brand's reputation and relationships.

But don't panic. Conflict can be managed. Public relations professionals are like superheroes without capes, swooping in to save the day. They work hard to build and maintain trust between brands and their audiences, preventing conflicts from escalating into disasters.

Remember, organisations rely on their publics, and vice versa. That's why public relations is so important in handling conflicts. It's been proven time and again, from the Pepsi syringe scare in 1993 to Starbucks' bias controversy in 2018.

The backstory of the Starbucks quiet war? In 2018, Starbucks faced quite a controversial conflict that involved a case of public concerns. The company's first response was a public apology issued by its CEO, expressing deep remorse.

Along with this apology, came immediate actions, as the company shutdown a good number of its stores worldwide for an afternoon to conduct racial bias training for employees, oriented towards supporting a culture of inclusivity. Policy changes were also implemented to ensure that every customer is regarded with due respect. The backstory? The store manager at the time phoned the police on two customers of African American descent who were waiting for a friend, and did not purchase any items. This consequently sparked controversy and questioned the company's view about racial discrimination, but the brands swift response and commitment helped to manage the conflict, and rebuild trust. These cases show how effective public relations can turn a crisis into an opportunity for growth.

So, next time conflict rears its head, remember the power of public relations. It's like having a trusty handyman around to fix things up when they go wrong. And who doesn't love a handyman?

### Bio:

My name is Chukwu Joy Chioma. I am a final year student of Mass Communication at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), with a special interest in Public Relations and Advertising. I'm a freelance writer. I write stories, and articles on a range of topics.

## Public Relations in Conflict management: A Chelsea Football Club Case Study Amid Russia-Ukraine War

— Jesutofunmi Akinde



Wondering why I chose Chelsea FC as a case study? Well, it's been my favourite football club since I was a kid. Conflict is everywhere, whether it's between individuals, within organisations, or among communities. That's why we need Public Relations (PR). PR acts like a superhero for organisations, using strategic communication to manage conflicts.

*Let's dive into the story of Chelsea FC. Stick with me, and I promise it'll be worth your while.*

Chelsea Football Club, a European club based in London, England, was established in 1905 and has since become a powerhouse in English football, leaving an indelible mark on the European stage. The club's participation in various European competitions, including the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League, has been consistent, reflecting its status among the continent's football elite.

However, amidst their European football endeavors, Chelsea Football Club found itself entangled in the complexities of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The geopolitical tensions surrounding the conflict raised questions about the club's stability and reputation.

The conflict, which started in 2014 and escalated in 2022, created a tricky situation for Chelsea FC, especially since its owner, Roman Abramovich, had ties to Russia. The global reaction to this conflict, including the imposition of sanctions, created a complex and unstable environment that impacts various industries, including sports. This raised questions about the club's stance on the conflict and potential repercussions.

The looming threat of sanctions and the possibility of Abramovich selling the club added layers of complexity. Chelsea FC needed a strategic PR approach to navigate these challenges while safeguarding its reputation.

The discussions in the UK Parliament regarding potential sanctions on Abramovich heightened concerns about the implications for the club, prompting the need for a strategic and nuanced PR approach. The challenges confronting Chelsea FC were multifaceted. The impending threat of sanctions, coupled with the forced sale of the club, added layers of complexity. Managing this transition effectively without compromising the hard-earned reputation became a paramount concern for the club.

Despite the uncertainty, Chelsea FC emphasized stability and ethical values. They used PR to showcase their commitment to humanitarian causes, distancing themselves from any perceived alignment with the conflict. Maintaining trust was crucial, hence, the club ensured consistent and reliable communication across various channels. Social media became a vital tool for engaging with fans and fostering a sense of community during uncertain times.

The Public Relation strategies deployed for this conflict which could have resulted into a major crisis include consistent and well-crafted messages disseminated across various channels, including social media, press releases, and direct communication with stakeholders.

The lessons from Chelsea FC's PR strategy during the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlight the importance of transparent communication and ethical commitments during crises.



In times of geopolitical unrest, organizations, especially those in the public eye, must recognize the power of transparent communication, ethical commitments, and proactive stakeholder engagement. Chelsea FC's successful navigation through these challenges serves as a testament to the critical role of PR in preserving an organization's integrity, reputation, and stakeholder relationships during times of conflict. As the world continues to grapple with uncertainties, the lessons learned from Chelsea FC's PR playbook provide valuable insights for organizations facing similar challenges in the future.

The case study of Chelsea FC amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict provides valuable insights into effective PR strategies during geopolitical unrest. Chelsea FC commitment

to ethical practices and humanitarian causes showcased the club's responsibility, reinforcing its standing in the global football community.

#### Bio:

Jesutofunmi Akinde, a results-driven PR specialist, brings a wealth of expertise in crisis communications, media relations, and event planning. With a proven track record of managing numerous high-profile campaigns for both B2B and B2C clients, Jesutofunmi is renowned for her ability to develop engaging campaigns and convey impactful messages. Her proficiency in data analysis allows her to deliver result-driven campaigns that surpass conventional approaches, emphasizing excellence, collaboration, and achieving impactful outcomes for organizations.

Holding a first-class degree in Communication and Media Studies from Afe Babalola University, Tofunmi has honed her skills in public relations, advertising, and applied communication. Her professional journey includes contributing to successful campaigns for renowned clients such as Disney Studios (Black Panther 2), Jim Lyke, Women King, Uncover, and Blue Poppy. In her role, she secured media coverage, created captivating content, and executed impactful events. Additionally, she has served as a PR Account Manager for prestigious establishments such as Abuja Continental Hotel, Pier Harbor Residences and Spa, and Clayhall by SRS, overseeing their PR strategies and activities.

Beyond her client-focused work, Tofunmi is passionate about utilizing PR for sustainable development and social impact. As a writer and member of ForbesBLK, she showcases her storytelling skills, affirming her talent in the industry. Recognized as a Top Public Relations voice on LinkedIn, she further amplifies her influence in the industry's digital sphere.



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# De-escalation as a Quiet War Technique

— Onyinye Nwachukwu



**TL:DR “When you fight a war quietly, very few people are aware of what happened and how it happened; this is a good thing as the only thing better than a crisis handled efficiently is a crisis that nobody knows happened.”**

## What comes to your mind when you hear brand wars?

The most vivid images for me are X(formerly Twitter) threads where an unsatisfied customer comes to alert the public of a perceived wrong meted out on them by a brand or an executive of a brand. What usually ensues, which is what then turns it into a war is the piling from the general public including other stakeholders of that who also share the same sentiments towards that brand. That is a war where the brand is fighting against the bias of its audience and what satisfaction means to them.

Quiet wars are wars that take place without disrupting the peace. They require a lot of tact, experience and often involve processes that have been set in place even before the occurrence of the war. When you fight a war quietly, very few people are aware of what happened; This is a good thing as the only thing better than a crisis handled efficiently is a crisis that nobody knows happened.

## Winning this war, QUIETLY

Crisis management is an important part of organisational practices because your brand's image affects your customers behaviour. It's much more cost-effective to maintain stakeholder satisfaction than to try to win them over again.

PR professionals and PR business partners globally, advise business that the first steps to de-escalating a crisis is establishing crisis communication protocols - having an understanding of what crises are and knowing what the appropriate response technique is; even before the crisis occurs. This article would discuss what to do when your organisation is facing a crisis and instances where potential trouble should be navigated by de-escalation.

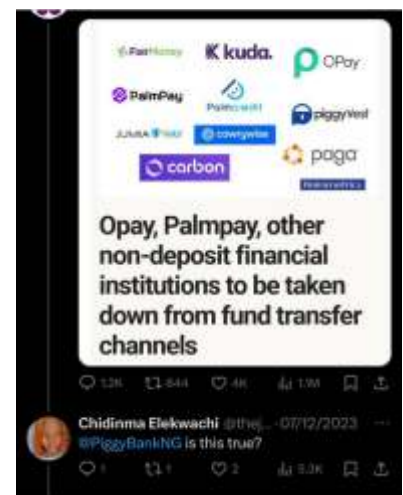
## How do you know when it's best to de-escalate?

When scrolling through the internet and you come across a comment about your brand and you are not sure how to feel about it, the PR instinct to measure by three metrics, Content of the message: What is the person saying? Are they making a complaint or an observation? Is the customer pointing out a problem? Is the complaint potentially damaging? Is it an indicator of an interface that is difficult to navigate? The first thing to do when confronted with a potential crisis is to analyse the content of the complaint; identify what type of message is being passed across. Context: understanding the situations surrounding complaints are an important determinant for when de-escalation can be used.

Is there trouble with the app or system already? Is there trouble in the land? Are customers reacting to a perceived fear or an actual issue?

Concern: what is the complainant's concern and how best can it be addressed. In some cases, when analysing this concern you would be able to identify when a response requires an official address and a need to de-escalate and when the customer is making an observation.

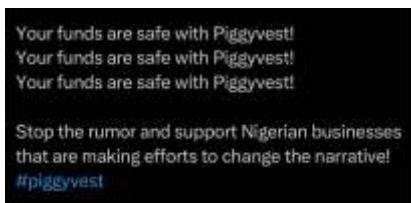
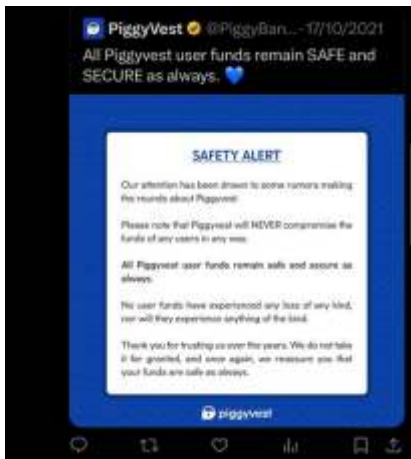
## Let's analyse these Twitter complaints from two different Piggyvest's customers



## Which of these complaints could escalate into an image damaging crisis?

While the first image shows a customer making a complaint about an error in her journey, the second image shows a customer voicing fear about her saved funds.

As a financial management solution it is reputation damaging for your customers to feel that their funds are not safe in their virtual wallet. In this context, the CBN had announced a regulation that affected virtual banks and Nigerians everywhere were worried about their savings on virtual platforms just like Piggyvest. Piggy vest responded by releasing a statement clarifying their position and reassured their customers. They also took it a step further by launching an educative campaign about virtual cards.



## De-escalation Techniques Brands Can Use to Win The War

### Negotiation

When a business wide issue is affecting your customer's journey or their business processes, it is a practical move to offer promos, consultations, refunds to make up for the issue. This is a classic case of negotiating. Here you have prevented a possible escalation where the customer could potentially seek justice from the court of public opinion. Make a mental note to abide by the company's refund policies and ensure that you restate your mission to serve.

### Keep the Calm

In situations where customers are expressing fears or unsettlement, organisations should be able to pass their message without further antagonising the customer. Understand that complaints are often driven by discontentment and your responses should show that you understand the clients worries.

Effective communication-(active listening)

You can conclude that effective communication has been achieved when the brand and its audience completely understand each other's position during a crisis. When trying to de-escalate, active listening becomes the most important communication skill of the brand's representative as it informs the response that would set de-escalation in motion. Active listening involves being able to summarise a complaint and identify the pain point or the unmet need that has risen from an interaction with your brand and then providing a solution or an avenue for that stakeholder to express themselves clearly while still restating your brand mission and values.

When using de-escalating as a conflict resolution technique - the goal is simple, it is to ensure that the customer once again feels in control of their situation; in doing this the brand is able to control the

narrative, prevent an escalation of the crisis, make a statement to its existing and prospective customer base and manage the public perception of the brand that would have been damaged.

#### Bio:

Onyinye is a marketing and communications professional with experience in growing the visibility of organisations through digital marketing, reputation management and business to business partnership strategies.

Her career has grown over the years from managing social media pages of brands to managing communication strategies, corporate events, media relations and executive branding to c-suite executives of organisations and has cut across various sectors ranging from real estate to e-commerce, agency experience and the tech industry. This has led to an expansive knowledge on growth, marketing and partnership opportunities for businesses across various industries.

When I am not writing strategy documents and designing campaigns, I like to argue about marketing and Nigerian politics on Twitter, research on agriculture and create content on Instagram.

I am open to conversations and opportunities in global communications, sustainable agriculture in Africa, and nonprofits focused on empowering women with self sustainable skills.





# Ethical Dilemma in Crisis Communications for Public Relations Practitioners

— Oiza Balogun



In today's digital era, PR professionals face potential crises daily. Social media and the internet expose brands to unprecedented vulnerabilities, echoing Warren Buffet's insight: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it." A single misstep can trigger a social media storm, eroding years of carefully built trust.

Amidst crisis, navigating ethical dilemmas challenges even "foolproof" strategies, particularly in Nigeria's PR sector. PR practitioners serve as more than storytellers; they're custodians of trust, balancing effectiveness with ethical duty.

Before we dive into the nitty-gritty, let's be clear: crisis management isn't just about damage control. It's a strategic function, aimed at protecting both the brand's reputation and the trust of its stakeholders. It's about acknowledging mistakes, crafting a transparent narrative, and emerging stronger on the other side.

A perfect example of crisis communication done right is when Toyota recalled 1 million vehicles in December 2023 due to a defect that may have prevented the airbags and brakes from functioning properly. Toyota adopted a transparent and communicative approach throughout the crisis. They issued frequent updates to the public, detailing the progress of the recall efforts and provided reassurance regarding the safety and reliability of their vehicles once the issues were resolved. This is just one example of the case studies we'll explore in this article. Let's dissect the complexities of transparency, the ethical boundaries of 'spin', and the delicate art of balancing stakeholder needs.



By sharing these experiences and learnings, we hope to equip ourselves with the tools to navigate these murky waters with ethics and effectiveness in mind.

## Let's start with the cornerstone of any crisis response: transparency.

In a country where 73% of citizens expect brands to be upfront during crises (according to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer), withholding information is a recipe for disaster. Remember the Indomie scare? On the 9th of May 2004, Indomie, a popular brand of noodles in Nigeria experienced its biggest reputation test in the market. Someone reportedly died after being said to have consumed Indomie noodles and many more were in the hospital battling for their lives for the same reason.

The initial silence fueled speculations that began to damage the trust that people had in the brand and they realized they had to act.

To salvage the reputational damage and assure the public of the purity of its products, De-United Foods organized a press conference to clear the air on the situation and a media facility tour of the Indomie noodles factory to show the production process. There were also stakeholder workshops and tasting sessions to dispel the rumours of contamination. This is important because everything we do in the field of public relations is about building trust. Trust is the license to operate and if the trust of a brand has been eroded, it can be said that the brand has begun its journey to death.

Transparency, however, is about finding a healthy balance rather than just telling everything. Oversharing might draw unwarranted attention, and downplaying the problem runs the danger of being accused of being dishonest. This is demonstrated by the SCOAN saga. The church's administration quickly refuted the information presented in the BBC documentary "Discipleship," which focused on TB Joshua.

People in the public began blaming the church for this since, in addition to debunking, they refrained from speaking with the media.

The challenge here for PR professionals is the issue of disclosure. If you are dealing with clients with low moral standard who is not ready to bare it all to you as their PR consultant, it becomes a dilemma to navigate the corridor of ethical standard in that situation. During crises, the ethical dilemma of how much to reveal or withheld arises. While PR professionals must protect their clients, they must also uphold transparency and honesty, even when addressing challenging situations. Representing clients with controversial or unethical practices can be ethically complex for PR practitioners.

### Navigating the Ethical 'Spin' Zone

As a recent graduate, I often heard the term 'Spin' and initially associated it with the notion of public relations being synonymous with disinformation and manipulating facts. However, as I became knowledgeable in the field, my perspective on 'Spin' changed. I began to ponder whether employing spin could serve a constructive purpose in crisis communication while upholding ethical standards. Much like many aspects of PR, the answer to this question is multifaceted and not always clear-cut.

When rooted in truth and facts, emphasizing positive aspects amid a crisis isn't inherently negative. Truth remains paramount; when endeavoring to counter adverse commentary, it's essential that any opposing narrative is backed by factual accuracy. Amid crises, I often observe brands leveraging influencers to sway public opinion in their favor. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that their actions lack sincerity or conceal certain truths.

The delicate art of balancing stakeholder needs Ethics become even more complex when considering stakeholder demands. Imagine a factory fire at Dangote Cement, endangering workers' lives. Balancing the need for employee safety with the pressure to maintain production and appease investors is a delicate decision. Here, open communication and empathy are key. The brand will have to prioritize employee safety and well-being by demonstrating genuine concern and taking swift action to address their needs. This approach fosters trust and loyalty, even amidst difficult decisions. During a crisis, it is expected to be reactive and find every way to ensure that the situation blows away quickly but putting ourselves in the shoes of each stakeholder group allows us to understand their concerns and tailor our communication accordingly.

Navigating crisis management is more than just strategic brilliance; it requires a commitment to ethical responsibility. As practitioners committed to ethical practices, you must; Insist on full disclosure from your client when dealing with a crisis, just like lawyers do for any case they are handling. Not be lured by the fleeting sweetness of quick fixes during crises but focus on building trust, a robust foundation like the ancient Iroko tree, can withstand even the fiercest storms. Measure the impact of your communication, not just likes and shares, but the seeds of trust you've sown.

Remember, you are more than just a PR practitioner or storyteller; you are a strategic consultant, a bridge-builder, and an architect of trust. As you step beyond the headlines and into the heart of ethical crisis communication, let these principles guide your path.

#### Bio:

Oiza leverages her inherent storytelling prowess, honed through a Theatre Arts and Mass Communications degree from the University of Benin, to craft strategic communication narratives. For her, public relations transcends a mere profession; it's a passionate pursuit fueled by the desire to forge meaningful connections between brands and their various stakeholders.



# The Necessity of Conflict Management for SME Growth and Survival

— Ebunolouwa Amusan



The strength, growth, and resilience of small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the success of any blooming economy. The SME sector's performance directly impacts the country's GDP, making it a significant contributor to economic growth.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Africa's economy, providing 80% of jobs and driving socio-economic growth. Across to sub-Saharan Africa, 44 million SMEs are currently operational. A promising report by Agustoresearch predicts that these businesses will contribute 49.5% to GDP by 2024, largely fuelled by the booming wholesale and retail trade sector.

Despite this cheering news, a recent report by the Fate Foundation paints a nuanced picture of the SME sector. It highlights the crucial role of business "birth" and "mortality" in gauging the health of a nation's entrepreneurial ecosystem. In 2023, the "business birth rate" in Nigeria dipped slightly to 30%, down from 32% in the year before.

While the overall outlook for Nigerian SMEs remains positive, this decline in new business creation warrants closer attention. Could conflict management be an indirect cause of the decline?

Conflicts are natural occurrences of disagreement between two or more parties. When Individuals and organizations cannot align on simple or multiple levels of ideas, power/authority, point of view, values, interests, or structures, there will be conflict.

For SMEs, conflict can offer two paths: it can either be a catalyst for growth, innovation, and creativity when considered as an opportunity or a condition that can spiral into ideological disputes,

jeopardizing the very existence of the SME. A conflict is not a crisis; it is the inability to manage it effectively that results in a crisis. Conflict is also not a sign of business failure. Organizations that have made time to put in place proper processes in managing conflict, consider it a walk in the park.

Hence the reason, why it is easier to assume that public relations, conflict resolution, and crisis management are a discourse for large corporations, government agencies, and complex organizations with sizeable PR teams and crisis teams. The assumption that they also have more to lose if conflict spins into a crisis begs for questioning. Over time, it has been realized that SMEs and MSMEs face more threats to their existence when conflicts are left unaddressed, or improperly addressed. Remember, even the mightiest oak (large organizations) started as a tiny acorn (SMEs). What then, is the basic conflict management process for SMEs?

Scholars have postulated several processes, theories, and approaches for conflict management, but it all begins with paying attention to The People and The Process.

**The People** - refer to the Staff, Customers, and Stakeholders – the Public, as in the definition of Public Relations- (Internal and External). Since conflict arises from people, SMEs need to intentionally create an environment that encourages collaboration, healthy competition, and feedback (Open Communication). Imagine a workplace where feedback flows freely, and disagreements are seen as opportunities for growth, not roadblocks.

**The Process** - In today's hyper-competitive market, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) stand or fall on their ability to deliver on their brand promises. Every interaction with a customer is a tightrope walk – a chance to forge trust and loyalty or build enmity and disappointment. Subpar products and shoddy packaging only leave sour tastes in the mouths and wallets of the customers. Not forgetting unprofessional customer service. The fallout from unfulfilled promises is deadly to SMEs. It erodes trust, tarnishes reputations, and decreases the customer base.

The first step to managing conflict as an SME is to determine the cause of the Conflict objectively. Panic is not an option, neither is hearsay. The cause of the conflict will determine to a long extent the quality of the resolution process. This will require knowing who is/ was involved, (persons affected), the extent of damage in terms of value, and impact, and thereafter comes Resolution. Resolution is the point of either a compromise or collaboration. Since there are no perfect businesses, and every business is on a growth journey towards perfection. SMEs must be willing to either take the path of compromise or collaboration. There have been several cases on social media of what I ordered versus what I got from SMEs; those seemingly rant posts have cost several SMEs the loss of more customers than they ever imagined.

Compromise is not a request to lower standards but to give allowance for the sake of customer retention since it is cheaper for a business to maintain than acquire a customer. Imagine co-creating solutions, building trust, and fostering a long-term partnership.



The consensus commonly agreed to is usually beneficial to both parties. The process of collaborating is the process of growth and expansion between the parties involved. When there is a conflict and the parties reach a consensus to collaborate, there is usually a boom in sales and customer acquisition. Lastly, everything and anything with the conflict process must be reviewed. The tactics/ ideas deployed, the human process involved, and the result and quality of the agreement reached.

Just liked Kenneth Kaye. "If we manage conflict constructively, we harness its energy for creativity and development." This statement is apt in the discourse of SME conflict management. Resolution of conflict for SMEs' critical stakeholders outweighs the reduction in customers, staff strength, and sales targets. The impact spells slow painful death for even the most promising venture. Equally, embracing constructive management can serve as a springboard for expansion and national growth, nurturing an environment where conflict fuels innovation and progress.

**Bio:**

Forget building brands, Ebunoluwa conjures empires. For over 10 years, she's been the architect behind impactful campaigns that ignite hearts and drive bottom lines. Fueled by a passion for uncovering human insights and translating them into brand strategies that resonate, she helps brands unlock value with visible results. Currently, Ebunoluwa wields her strategic magic at Union Bank, weaving brand narratives as a Brand Analyst and orchestrating high-impact events that connect brands with their audience. There's more brand magic to be made together. Connect with me on



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## What happens when things go wrong from the inside out? — Amy Steadman



Working as an in-house PR for a large NGO, the teams around you are everything. You rely on colleagues across fundraising, content, programmes and beyond to provide you with stats, insight and so much more on a daily basis. You profile their success, protect their mistakes and champion their work. The relationship is symbiotic, positive and supportive. Fall outs are rare, and external mud-slinging even more so.

But what happens when things go wrong from the inside out? When these colleagues collectively disagree with an organizational decision and leak confidential information to the press, without telling the comms team? Journalists love nothing more than a warts and all leak, and dishing the dirt from the inside is sure to generate PR hits that exceed all your targets – if only they were positive. This internal scoop can also be terribly damaging for stakeholder relations – donors, corporates and supporters are far more likely to trust what staff are leaking than a neatly spun PR statement. How you communicate with your stakeholders, and when, becomes critical at this time.

In my twenty years working in news and PR teams across a range of international NGOs, this situation has happened to me several times, and it's one of the most challenging, difficult and emotionally conflicted professional situations I have found myself in.

Whether or not you agree and support your colleagues, as a PR, your primary role is to protect the reputation of your organization, but when that splinters down the middle, your colleagues shift from being your teammates, to scoring a home run for the opposition. How do you navigate being both their colleague, and simultaneously defending the organization's decision they so strongly disagree with. You may find that colleagues you saw as friends suddenly don't trust you, are no longer willing to share information with you or stop reaching out. Disentangling the personal from the professional, rising above the emotion and navigating this can be really tough.

In my experience, it almost doesn't matter what detail has been leaked, most negative internal fallout requires a similar response and process. Below, I've listed actions I recommend taking when things go wrong from the inside out, and the order in which to initiate them. Remember the goal is to limit reputational damage, keep stakeholders on board and ensure external and internal trust is restored.

**Divide and conquer.** Call a meeting with the press team – include junior staff who will probably know more about what's going on internally than more senior staff. Divide roles – allocate someone to manage internal comms, another for donor and corporate relationships, and another for press queries.

Start a Q&A doc. And make sure it's signed off at Director level and used exclusively when delivering any messaging regarding the situation. Keeping an open and engaged dialogue with ALL key players is the key priority here. If the situation develops out of hours, ensure those on call are fully up to speed and know how to deal with press queries.

**Keep talking to the press.** A 'no comment' statement here is catastrophic and suggests you have something to hide. You don't need to be proactive, but make sure you remain reactive. You will no doubt be inundated with requests for comments and interviews during this time. Even if you have yet to finessed a statement, take calls, keep the dialogue open and let journalists know you'll be in touch with a written statement in due course – don't get drawn into commenting directly on the phone or via email.



**Put it in writing – only.** Putting spokespeople up for lives or even pre-records in this situation is ill advised. You don't know who else could be 'down the line' or has been interviewed already. Keep it to one, short written comment and turn down interviews. Review your comment and update as required.

**Clarity, even without certainty.** Reach out to your stakeholders before they reach out to you. Being proactive with your communication looks honest and shows willing. Donors, sponsors and corporate partners will expect to be updated and are more likely to continue to trust the organization if you proactively reach out to them with regular updates. This is true even if you don't have a ton of information to share - think about waiting in an airport for a delayed plane - an airline that sends a rep.

to tell you they will update you with news when they have it is so much better than no one coming to tell you anything – even if the outcome is the same and the plane is still grounded with an engine problem 300 miles away.

**Work closely with internal communication colleagues** – they will be organizing staff briefings and internal communications – encourage them to be proactive and ensure all messaging is aligned with your Q&A. Prepare for further leaks. Assume anything you share internally can be shared with the press – keep it fair, clean and non-accusatory.

**Review your website and social media platforms** and update / remove anything that inflames the situation or risks further reputational damage to you or your stakeholders.

**Look at upcoming events** – does anything need to be cancelled or restructured in light of what has happened?

Finally, remember, this too shall pass. It may not be pretty, it may take some time but your organization won't always be under a negative media glare.

#### Bio:

Amy Steadman has spent the last 20 years working in press offices and managing media teams in a range of international NGOs from Save the Children and Global Witness to WWF-UK. Currently Amy, who is a dual US / UK citizen is living in San Francisco and works as a freelance communications consultant and journalist.



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# The Crucial Role of Internal Public Relations in Conflict Mitigation within Organizations

Boitumelo Tlala



According to Zipdo.co, strained relationships among employees account for 60–80% of organizational difficulties, resulting in a 12% decrease in productivity for those dealing with workplace conflict. Senior management spends over 20% of their time on conflict resolution, costing companies an average of \$359 billion annually.

It's evident that conflict within organizations is both prevalent and costly. How can Public Relations Professionals (PRPs) aid in conflict mitigation and cultivate a more conducive work environment for employees?

Public relations entails strategically managing relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, utilizing communication to achieve mutual understanding, organizational goals, and serve the public interest (Canadian Public Relations Society, 2023). Therefore, the significance of internal public relations cannot be overstated, emphasizing clear communication channels and messages that foster a culture where employees feel comfortable expressing themselves, ultimately reducing conflict and associated costs.

## Understanding Internal Stakeholders:

In an organization, employees serve various roles and have diverse needs. Internal PR professionals must grasp their audience's nuances, utilizing tools

like regular employee pulse surveys to gauge preferences and concerns. Acquiring and analyzing survey reports empowers PRPs to strategically address internal audience needs.

Furthermore, collaboration between PRPs and departments, including HR, IT, Operations, and EXCO, is pivotal for effective communication strategy development. Establishing strong relationships ensures seamless collaboration and facilitates conflict resolution.

Lastly, PRPs should ideally be part of the executive team or report directly to it, enabling swift implementation of initiatives with senior management support. Building relationships facilitates dialogue and contributes to conflict mitigation.

## The Power of Clear Communication:

Effective communication is paramount in navigating organizational challenges such as wage negotiations, layoffs, or crisis management. Internal PR aids in simplifying complex information, utilizing visual aids and clear calls to action to enhance understanding and reduce conflict.

## Fostering a Conducive Work Environment:

PRPs play a crucial role in advocating for employee involvement in strategic decision-making processes. Engaging employees in strategy development fosters a sense of ownership and purpose, reducing conflict arising from disconnection between employees and organizational goals.

## Utilizing Digital Platforms:

Adapting to technological advancements, PRPs leverage digital tools for seamless communication. Platforms like Employee Apps, desktop screen communications, bulk SMS, and social media facilitate timely and relevant information dissemination, enabling feedback collection and reducing workplace frustrations.

## Internal PRP as Brand Ambassadors:

PRPs uphold the organization's vision, mission, and values, reinforcing its narrative and corporate identity in all communications. By crafting narratives that inspire trust and align with stakeholders' needs, PRPs foster employee pride and productivity, ultimately contributing to organizational success and conflict mitigation.

As organizations strive for economic prosperity, internal public relations emerges as a vital tool in fostering employee engagement, clear communication, and conflict resolution. By prioritizing employee well-being and informed communication, organizations can effectively mitigate conflicts and cultivate a harmonious work environment.

# HARMONY IN DIVERSITY: NAVIGATING CONFLICT THROUGH AFRICAN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

— Veronica Abuede



African Emotional Intelligence transcends mere theory, becoming a powerful cultural force shaping work dynamics with its emphasis on self-awareness, empathy, and authentic connections within the African context. Its significance lies in navigating conflicts, fostering unity, and transforming disputes into collaborative triumphs, enriching the African PR landscape.

In 2023, as the coordinator of APRA, I spearheaded collaboration with ZIPRC for the Zambia conference, going beyond logistical arrangements. This partnership exemplified how African Emotional Intelligence fosters empathy and cultural sensitivity, culminating in the success of the 2023 APRA Conference. Likewise, Sterling Bank's crisis management in 2023 showcased the transformative potential of African Emotional Intelligence, restoring trust and loyalty through empathy and transparency.

The "Ubuntu Harmony" campaign illustrated how emotional intelligence effectively navigates corporate crises, highlighting interconnectedness and community.

However, the challenges and Limitations of the African Emotional Intelligence is not without it's limitation and changes. Integrating African Emotional Intelligence (AEI) into PR practices faces challenges such as :

- **Resistance to Change:** One significant challenge lies in overcoming resistance to change. Traditional PR approaches may clash with the principles of AEI, creating a reluctance to adopt new methodologies. Stakeholders accustomed to established practices may find it challenging to embrace the shift towards a more emotionally intelligent PR framework.

- **Cultural Differences within Africa:** Africa's diversity extends beyond geographical borders, encompassing a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions. Implementing AEI requires a nuanced understanding of these cultural variations. Tailoring emotional intelligence strategies to resonate with diverse cultural contexts poses a complex challenge, demanding a careful balance between universality and cultural specificity.
- **Training Programs and Limited Awareness:** Cultivating emotional intelligence skills demands thorough training programs. PR professionals need to develop a deep understanding of AEI principles, including self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication. Implementing such training programs requires substantial time, resources, and commitment from organizations to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable integration of AEI into PR practices. A lack of awareness and understanding regarding the concept of AEI presents another hurdle. Many PR professionals may not be familiar with the principles and benefits of AEI, hindering its effective implementation. Educational efforts are essential to bridge this knowledge gap and foster a collective understanding of how AEI can enhance PR practices.

**Leadership in promoting African Emotional Intelligence:**

Effective PR leaders prioritize empathy, cultural sensitivity, and inclusivity, fostering environments where team members feel valued and heard. They navigate conflicts collaboratively, leveraging individual strengths and promoting continuous learning to enhance emotional intelligence skills among PR professionals.

**Comparison with Global PR Organizations:**

Comparing APRA with global PR organizations reveals distinct communication styles, crisis management approaches, and stakeholder engagement methods. APRA emphasizes relational communication, nuanced crisis management, and community-centric stakeholder engagement, contrasting with the standardized, formal approaches of global PR organizations.

Embracing African Emotional Intelligence in PR practices presents challenges but promises profound rewards, including improved conflict resolution and strengthened stakeholder relations. As we embark on this transformative journey, we must ponder how the embrace of African Emotional Intelligence may reshape the global PR landscape, ushering in a culturally enriched future.

**Bio:**

Veronica Abuede is a dynamic Administrator-turned-Communicator with over 15 years of experience in diverse fields, including Information Technology, Real Estate, Engineering, Human Resources, and Administration. With a background in Electronics and Computer Engineering and ongoing studies in International Business Management, Veronica excels in adapting to various professional domains. She boasts a proven track record in communication, problem-solving, and leadership. Currently serving as the Coordinator at the Africa Public Relations Association (APRA), Veronica collaborates with diverse teams and stakeholders, refining her ability to adapt and communicate effectively in multicultural settings. In her PR role, she leverages her extensive experience to promote cultural understanding and unity through effective communication and emotional intelligence strategies.





## Adapting public relations to political storms in Africa

— Cyrille DJAMI



Navigating through political storms in Africa has always been a challenge, with ingredients such as corruption, ethnic tensions and economic inequalities making the task even more complex. In this delicate dance, public relations experts play a crucial role in preserving the image of governments, political parties and leaders. In this article, we will explore how PR strategies have evolved over time, using concrete examples and anecdotes to shed light on this transformation.

Understanding the landscape of political crises on the continent requires an in-depth look at factors such as corruption, ethnic tensions

and armed conflict. The recent upheavals in Mali, the post-electoral saga in Côte d'Ivoire and the demonstrations in South Africa all bear witness to this reality.

In the past, the tendency was to maintain strict control over information, often by limiting media access to crisis zones. But things are changing. Transparency is becoming a watchword. A notable example? In 2020, during the protests in Nigeria against police brutality, the government chose the path of transparency. Regular press conferences, publicly announced police reforms and open dialogue with the protest leaders helped to ease tensions and restore some public confidence.

**Social networks have become essential partners in the management of political crises on the continent. Governments and political leaders use them to share information, engage the public and counter negative narratives. An edifying example? During the disputed elections in Zimbabwe in 2018, President Mnangagwa took Twitter by storm to communicate directly with the population. This proactive approach on social networks played a crucial role in managing the post-election crisis.**

A striking development is the emphasis placed on collaboration with international players. Rather than withdrawing, governments are seeking to collaborate with non-governmental organisations and international institutions. A telling example? During the political unrest in Burundi in 2015, the government worked with the African Union and other international mediators to facilitate dialogue. This strengthened the government's credibility and contributed to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Information campaigns are now an essential asset in the arsenal of public relations in times of crisis. Initiatives such as awareness campaigns, media publications and conferences are deployed to positively influence public opinion. A concrete example?

**During the political unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019, the government launched an intensive information campaign. Messages were broadcast on radio, television and social networks to inform the public about the government's efforts to resolve the crisis. This campaign opened up a space for dialogue and helped to reduce tensions.**

In conclusion, the evolution of public relations strategies in Africa in the face of political crises is a story of transition towards transparency, engagement on social networks, international collaboration and targeted information campaigns. These changes reflect a growing awareness of the importance of effective communication in

preserving political stability and the reputation of political actors in Africa. By adopting these new approaches, public relations professionals are helping to shape a more transparent and resilient political landscape on the continent. A development that will hopefully pave the way for more humane and authentic communication in difficult times.

#### Bio:

Cyrille Djami is a specialist in strategic and influential communications, with extensive experience in advising organisations and individuals. He has spent many years developing the brand image, reputation and awareness of his various clients, particularly on the African continent.

He is a dedicated mentor who regularly devotes his time to coaching communications students and young professionals in Africa. Cyrille often shares his expertise on communication issues in the media.

In addition, Mr Djami is the founder of CommsOfAfrica, a pan-African media outlet specialising in communication, media and content creation.

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# Utilising Storytelling: PR Techniques for Conflict Resolution

— Esther Adeyanju



In the tumultuous landscape of conflicts, where discord often reigns supreme, can a mere story wield the power to heal wounds, bridge chasms, and foster reconciliation? Can the art of storytelling transcend cultural divides, ethnic tensions, and socio-political rifts to pave the way for lasting resolutions? The evidence speaks volumes: According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, Nigeria consistently ranks among the nations grappling with the highest levels of societal violence and internal strife. From communal clashes to religious tensions and political unrest, these conflicts exact a heavy toll on lives, livelihoods, and national cohesion. Yet, amidst this turbulence, lies a beacon of hope - the transformative potential of storytelling in conflict resolution.

In times of crisis, PR professionals typically rush to issue press releases and deploy various PR tactics. Yet, few consider the potential effectiveness of a storytelling approach.

While storytelling is commonly employed in marketing to promote brands, its importance in conflict resolution is often overlooked.

However, the key lies in sharing your story, allowing your audience to perceive your authenticity and empathize with your experiences. This can turn them into advocates, defending your reputation to skeptics or those who may have lost faith in your brand. By delving into the field of narrative, backed by compelling data, statistics, and real-world case studies, I will unravel the profound impact of utilising storytelling as a strategic PR technique for navigating conflicts.

## Data-Driven Insight

The Global Peace Index highlights that conflicts cost the global economy over \$14 trillion annually, with violence and instability stifling growth and development. Moreover, a study by the United Nations Development Programme reveals that unresolved conflicts pose significant barriers to achieving sustainable development goals, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. In Nigeria, the toll of conflict is palpable, with communal clashes, religious tensions, and political unrest fracturing communities and impeding progress.

In the face of such adversity, traditional PR methods often prove inadequate, necessitating a paradigm shift towards storytelling as a strategic tool for fostering understanding and reconciliation.

## The Neuroscience of Storytelling:

According to neuroscience, stories activate various regions of the brain, including those responsible for language processing, sensory experiences, and emotions. This multifaceted engagement makes storytelling an effective vehicle for conveying complex ideas and emotions. In fact, studies have shown that narratives stimulate the release of oxytocin, often referred to as the "bonding hormone," promoting trust and empathy among individuals involved in conflict. It therefore means that storytelling holds immense potential to transcend barriers, humanize narratives, and promote reconciliation.

Research conducted by the Harvard Business Review reveals that stories are up to 22 times more memorable than facts alone. This statistic underscores the significance of incorporating storytelling into PR strategies for conflict resolution. Furthermore, a study published in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology found that narratives emphasising common ground and shared values can significantly reduce intergroup conflicts by fostering a sense of unity and cooperation.

## The PepsiCo India Initiative

In 2006, PepsiCo India faced a significant challenge when allegations arose regarding the presence of pesticides in their soft drinks. Rather than resorting to conventional PR tactics, the company employed storytelling to address the issue. Through a series of emotionally compelling narratives featuring local farmers and employees, PepsiCo conveyed its commitment to



quality, safety, and community welfare. As a result, public perception shifted positively, and consumer trust was restored, demonstrating the transformative power of storytelling in conflict resolution.

### The Role of Storytelling in Niger Delta Conflict Resolution

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has long been plagued by conflicts stemming from environmental degradation, resource exploitation, and socio-economic marginalization. In response, organisations such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have employed storytelling as a PR technique to engage stakeholders, amplify voices, and drive positive change. Through documentaries, community forums, and digital storytelling initiatives, the NDDC has shed light on the human impact of the conflict, empowered local narratives, and mobilized support for sustainable development initiatives.

### Implementing Storytelling Strategies:

To harness the full potential of storytelling in PR techniques for conflict resolution, leaders must adopt a strategic approach:

**Authenticity:** Authentic storytelling resonates deeply with audiences, fostering trust and credibility. Leaders should prioritize genuine narratives that reflect organizational values and aspirations. Mentioning Authenticity makes me recall the Patagonia's Environmental Activism. Patagonia, the outdoor clothing company, has become renowned for its authentic storytelling in advocating for environmental conservation. Through campaigns, documentaries, and social media, Patagonia consistently communicates its commitment to environmental sustainability, reflecting its core values and aspirations. By aligning its narratives with genuine actions such as donating proceeds to environmental causes and

reducing its carbon footprint, Patagonia has cultivated trust and credibility among its audience, leading to widespread support for its initiatives.

**Empathy:** Effective storytelling requires a deep understanding of the perspectives and emotions of all parties involved in the conflict. By empathizing with stakeholders, leaders can craft narratives that bridge divides and cultivate mutual understanding. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa stands as a powerful example of storytelling driven by empathy. Established in the aftermath of apartheid, the TRC provided a platform for victims and perpetrators to share their stories, facilitating healing and reconciliation. By listening to and empathizing with diverse perspectives and experiences, the TRC created narratives that transcended divisions, fostering a collective understanding of the past and paving the way for a more inclusive and united future.

**Compelling Narratives:** Stories should be crafted with precision, employing vivid imagery, relatable characters, and engaging plots to captivate audiences and drive home key messages. For instance, Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" is a testament to the impact of compelling narratives in driving social change. Through thought-provoking advertisements, Dove challenged conventional beauty standards, celebrating diversity and authenticity. By portraying real women with diverse body types and backgrounds, Dove created narratives that resonated deeply with audiences, sparking conversations and empowering individuals to embrace their uniqueness. This compelling storytelling not only enhanced Dove's brand perception but also contributed to broader discussions on body positivity and self-acceptance.

**Transparency:** Transparency is essential in building trust and credibility. Leaders should be forthcoming about challenges,

failures, and lessons learned, weaving them into narratives that demonstrate resilience and integrity.

The Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol Crisis Management comes into play here. In 1982, Johnson & Johnson faced a crisis when seven people died after consuming cyanide-laced Tylenol capsules. In response, the company prioritized transparency and accountability in its communication efforts. Rather than downplaying the severity of the situation, Johnson & Johnson openly acknowledged the issue, recalled all Tylenol products, and implemented new safety measures. By being transparent about the challenges and lessons learned, Johnson & Johnson reassured the public of its commitment to consumer safety, ultimately regaining trust and credibility.

In the complex world of conflict resolution, what if the key to lasting peace and understanding is right before us, hidden in the simplicity of storytelling? Amidst the chaos, storytelling shines quietly but brightly, offering immense potential. As we confront discord, it's worth asking: Are we ready to tap into this transformative power? Each narrative thread we weave holds the power to break barriers, spark empathy, and build bridges across divides. Let us embrace storytelling not just as a strategy, but as a powerful force for change in our PR efforts. Within our stories lies the promise of unity, inspiration, and the dawn of lasting resolutions.

### Bio:

Esther Adeyanju works as the Corporate Communications Lead at the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria (CIPM), the apex regulatory body for Human Resource Management practice in Nigeria. Esther is an experienced Public Relations consultant with expertise in PR strategy, media engagement, content creation, digital marketing, and research. She has worked across various industries such as technology, finance, government, engineering, consumer goods, telecommunications, and more. Esther's goal is to help brands build a positive image and achieve their marketing goals. She is an associate member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON).

# Unlocking Resilience: The Power of Crisis Simulation Tool and Preparedness Training for Professionals

\_\_\_\_ Kanika Chabra



As a PR professional, navigating through crises is not just a possibility but inevitable in today's fast-paced world. The spotlight is merciless, and the stakes are tremendous. This is when preparedness training and crisis simulation techniques become useful. Imagine the following scenario: a crisis is simulated, tensions build, and quick judgments are needed. It's a calculated investment in resilience, not merely a drill. In this piece, we reveal the enormous effects that crisis simulation and preparedness training have on professionals such as ourselves, shedding light on how they improve our communication abilities, refine our intuition, and ultimately protect the integrity and good name of the companies we work for. Get ready for an adventure into the core of disaster preparedness, where precision meets preparation.

The unpredictable nature of crises and the significant risks associated with controlling public views and reputation are the reasons behind

the necessity of preparedness training in the PR industry. Organizations are constantly under scrutiny in the fast-paced media landscape of today, and any miscommunication during a crisis can have serious repercussions. PR professionals may lessen the effects of crises, uphold public confidence, and safeguard the credibility and reputation of their firm by investing in preparedness training.

Sophisticated platforms or exercises called crisis simulation tools are made to mimic actual crisis situations in a safe setting. Through these immersive and safe simulations, public relations professionals get practical experience in handling a variety of situations, from product recalls to natural disasters. These technologies mimic the complexity and severity of actual crises through the use of interactive scenarios, multimedia features, and realistic obstacles. This makes it possible for professionals to assess their crisis communication tactics,

decision-making abilities, and teamwork capabilities.

One of the primary advantages of crisis simulation tool for preparedness training in the public relations profession is their capacity to provide practical experience without the risk of real-life consequences. Participating in simulated crises allows PR professionals to practice drafting messaging, interacting with internal teams and external stakeholders, and addressing media queries in a low-pressure setting. This enables businesses to detect any flaws in their crisis communication plans and fine-tune their strategies accordingly, ensuring that they are well-prepared to respond successfully when a true crisis comes.

Additionally, crisis simulation tool facilitate collaboration and coordination among PR professionals and other key stakeholders, such as senior leadership, legal advisors, and external partners. By bringing these people together in a crisis simulation, these tools promote cross-functional communication, foster a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, and improve overall organizational readiness. Furthermore, crisis simulation tools often include debriefing sessions and post-exercise evaluations, allowing participants to reflect on their performance, identify lessons learned, and make improvements for future crises.

While preparedness training for PR professionals is crucial for navigating crises effectively, there are potential drawbacks that organizations should be aware of. One common drawback is the risk of complacency. If training exercises become routine or

participants feel overconfident in their abilities, they may not take the simulations seriously or fail to fully engage with the learning process. To avoid this, training programs should incorporate a variety of challenging scenarios and regularly update exercises to keep participants engaged.

Additionally, incorporating surprise elements or introducing unexpected twists during simulations can help prevent complacency and ensure that participants remain focused and attentive.

The possibility of unrealistic scenarios is another disadvantage of preparedness training. While simulations aim to replicate real-life crises, there is always the risk that the scenarios presented may not accurately reflect the complexities and nuances of actual events. To address this, training programs should strive to create scenarios that are as realistic and relevant as possible, drawing on past experiences, industry trends, and emerging threats. In addition, organizations can benefit from seeking input from subject matter experts, conducting thorough research, and incorporating feedback from participants to ensure that simulations are both challenging and authentic.

Finally, a common challenge in preparedness training is the logistical constraints of conducting large-scale simulations. Organizing and executing realistic training exercises can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, requiring careful planning, coordination, and investment. To overcome this challenge, organizations can leverage technology to facilitate virtual simulations or tabletop exercises, allowing participants to engage in training remotely while still experiencing realistic crisis scenarios. Additionally, partnering with external agencies or industry organizations can provide access to specialized expertise and resources, enabling organizations to conduct more robust and effective training exercises.

By addressing these potential drawbacks and implementing strategies to mitigate them, organizations can ensure that their preparedness training programs are effective, engaging, and ultimately contribute to building a culture of resilience and readiness within their PR teams.

The power of crisis simulation tools and preparedness training for professionals cannot be overstated. These innovative tools not only provide invaluable practical experience in navigating complex crises but also foster resilience, enhance collaboration, and promote proactive risk management within organizations. By immersing professionals in realistic scenarios and equipping them with the skills and strategies needed to effectively manage crises, these training programs empower individuals to respond swiftly, confidently, and decisively when faced with unexpected challenges. As the landscape of risk continues to evolve, investing in crisis simulation tools and preparedness training remains essential for organizations seeking to safeguard their reputation, protect their stakeholders, and thrive in an ever-changing world.

#### Bio:

MS KANIKA CHHABRA, THE FOUNDER & CEO OF V SPARK COMMUNICATIONS, With over a decade of PR and marketing expertise, Kanika Chhabra effortlessly dons multiple hats - a dedicated PR professional, an inspiring coach, and the visionary behind the highly successful brand management firm, V Spark Communications. Kanika Chhabra's journey began over one and a half decades ago, and it has been captivating.

Through hands-on experiences, brimming with learning and challenges, she has emerged as a true authority in Public Relations and communications. Her passion for being an avid communications specialist has driven her to steer numerous ventures from inception to becoming recognized brands, bridging the gap of new-age digital awareness and overseeing intrinsic brand strategies. Kanika Chhabra's impact on the PR industry is profound. Over the past 14+ years, she has left an indelible mark, mentoring and coaching more than 500+ PR professionals and interns.

Her dedication to popularizing the concept of Public Relations has helped over 360+ companies market themselves effectively, bringing them closer to their target audiences.





# Navigating Storms: Crisis Communication in International Conflicts

— Omotoyosi Ajayi



In today's world, characterized by heightened international tensions, effective crisis communication is more critical than ever for maintaining stability and averting escalation. Let's delve into the intricate landscape of crisis communication within the realm of recent international conflicts. By drawing from real-world case studies and contemporary events, we will explore the multifaceted challenges faced by public relations (PR) professionals tasked with managing public perception amidst geopolitical turmoil. Additionally, we will examine strategies for crafting clear, transparent, and culturally sensitive messages to mitigate misunderstandings and build trust between conflicting parties. Through this exploration, we aim to equip practitioners with actionable insights for navigating turbulent diplomatic waters in the modern era.

## Real-World Case Studies:

### The Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar:

The ongoing persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar has sparked

international outrage and condemnation. The Myanmar government's response to the crisis has been met with criticism for its lack of transparency and accountability. PR professionals have faced the challenge of managing the country's international reputation while addressing concerns about human rights abuses. By adopting a more transparent and compassionate approach, Myanmar could potentially improve its standing in the international community and facilitate dialogue towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

**The Ukraine-Russia Conflict:** The conflict between Ukraine and Russia, particularly in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, has led to ongoing tensions and diplomatic standoffs. Both sides have engaged in strategic communication to shape international perceptions and garner support for their respective positions. PR professionals on both sides have utilized various media channels and diplomatic channels to convey their messages and influence public opinion. However, the challenge lies in overcoming

deep-seated mistrust and finding common ground for dialogue and negotiation.

## Theoretical Frameworks:

**Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT):** The principles of SCCT apply to recent international conflicts, emphasizing the importance of reducing uncertainty, addressing stakeholder concerns, and repairing reputational damage. PR professionals involved in crisis communication must provide timely and accurate information to the public, acknowledge the concerns of all stakeholders, and demonstrate a commitment to resolving the crisis peacefully.

## Cultural Sensitivity and Cross-

**Cultural Communication:** Recent conflicts highlight the significance of cultural sensitivity in communication. PR professionals must navigate cultural nuances and differences in communication styles, values, and norms. By tailoring messages to resonate with the cultural context of each party involved, PR professionals can foster mutual understanding and facilitate conflict resolution.

## Strategies for Effective Crisis Communication:

**Transparency and Accountability:** Transparency is essential for building trust and credibility during international crises. PR professionals must strive to provide timely and accurate information to the public, even if it means acknowledging mistakes or shortcomings. By being transparent about the situation and the actions being taken to address it, organizations can demonstrate accountability and reassure stakeholders.

**Engagement and Dialogue:** Open dialogue and engagement with all relevant stakeholders are crucial during international conflicts. PR professionals should actively listen

to concerns, address questions, and seek input from affected parties. By involving stakeholders in the decision-making process and treating them as partners, organizations can build trust and promote cooperation.

**Digital Diplomacy and Social Media:** In the age of digital communication, social media platforms play a significant role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information during international crises. PR professionals must leverage digital diplomacy techniques to reach a global audience and counter misinformation effectively. By using social media platforms strategically, organizations can engage with stakeholders in real-time and shape the narrative

surrounding the conflict. In conclusion, effective crisis communication is essential for managing international conflicts and preventing escalation. By drawing from real-world case studies, theoretical frameworks, and practical strategies, PR professionals can navigate turbulent diplomatic waters in the modern era. By prioritizing transparency, engagement, and cultural sensitivity, organizations can build trust, mitigate misunderstandings, and contribute to peaceful conflict resolution on the global stage.

#### Bio:

Omotoyosi Ajayi is a distinguished marketing and public relations consultant with over 8 years of remarkable experience in the industry. With a passion for fostering meaningful connections and shaping perceptions, she has excelled in crafting innovative strategies that elevate brands and individuals alike.

Driven by a deep-seated interest in diplomatic affairs and the dynamics of the international community, Omotoyosi embarked on a journey to further hone her expertise. This led her to pursue a Master of International Law and Diplomacy program at the prestigious University of Lagos, where she delved into the intricacies of global relations and legal frameworks.

Combining her background in public relations with her newfound knowledge of international law and diplomacy, Omotoyosi aspires to bridge the gap between these fields. Her goal is to leverage her expertise to navigate the complex landscape of international relations, effectively communicating across cultures and borders. Eager to deepen her understanding and contribute to the discourse in this interdisciplinary field, Omotoyosi is gearing up for her next academic pursuit: a Ph.D. in International Law and Diplomacy. Through this endeavor, she seeks to not only expand her own horizons but also to make meaningful contributions to the intersection of public relations, law, and diplomacy on a global scale.

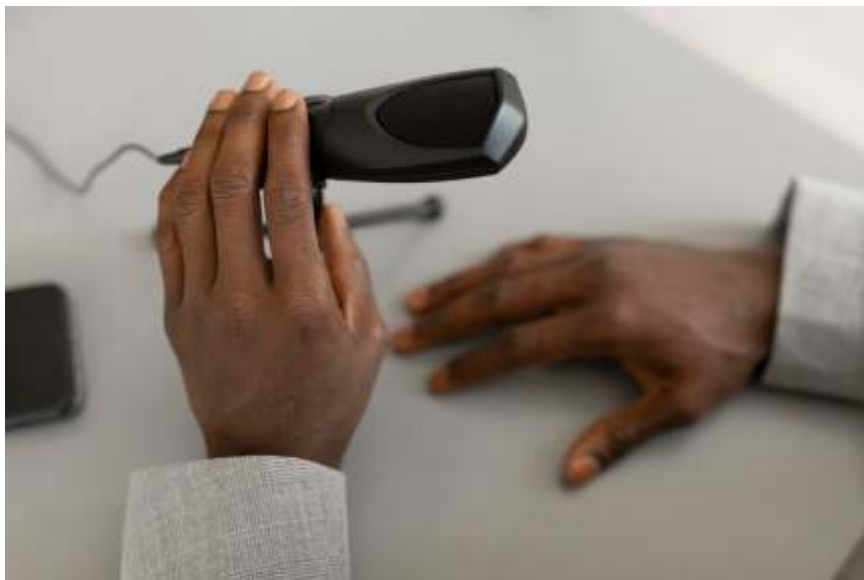


## Engaging Gen-Z - A PR Approach with a personal touch

— Josa Alice



In today's world, where globalization and technology play a vital role, it has become increasingly important for businesses and organizations to manage conflicts efficiently and uphold their brand image among the Gen Z audience. Gen Z refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who are a significant consumer group with unique digital habits and values. Therefore, businesses must develop and implement public relations (PR) strategies that are tailored to the Gen Z audience to navigate conflicts and maintain their brand perception. Here are various PR strategies that can help achieve this goal -



### Understanding Gen Z's Digital Habits and Values

In order to establish a strong connection with the members of the Gen Z demographic, it is imperative to gain an in-depth understanding of their digital behavior and principles. Gen Z is widely recognized for their active presence on various social media platforms and holds great significance to concepts such as transparency, authenticity, and social consciousness. They prioritize developing meaningful relationships with brands that share their values and exhibit genuine communication in their interactions.

### Proactive Conflict Management Strategies

To effectively manage conflicts among Gen Z, it's important to adopt certain strategies such as proactive social media engagement, transparent communication, influencer partnerships, user-generated content campaigns, cause marketing initiatives, interactive experiences, and community building. These approaches encourage open dialogue,

promote transparency, and are in line with Gen Z's preferences for brands that are authentic and socially conscious.

### Crisis Management Principles

Organizations need to be ready to deal with crises quickly and efficiently. Preparation involves identifying potential crises, establishing clear communication protocols, and conducting regular training to ensure readiness. During a crisis, transparency, authenticity, empathy, and accountability are critical. Organizations should communicate honestly, acknowledge their errors, and provide specific steps to make things right.

### Proactive Social Media Engagement

In order to effectively manage conflicts and improve relationships with Gen Z, it's important for brands to be proactive and engaged on social media platforms. This means actively communicating with them in an authentic and transparent way on the platforms where they spend most of their time. By

addressing their concerns and issues in real-time, brands can demonstrate that they value and understand Gen Z's perspectives, while also fostering constructive dialogues that help bridge any gaps in understanding. This approach can help reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and ultimately enhance brand reputation among Gen Z.

**Leveraging Transparency, Social Media, and Influencers**  
Clear and transparent communication is essential when dealing with conflicts involving Gen Z. Brands must be honest and straightforward about any issues or controversies to build trust and credibility with this demographic. This requires openly discussing actions taken to cultivate a positive perception. Social media plays a crucial role in crisis management for Gen Z. Companies must monitor their channels closely, respond promptly, and engage with stakeholders in dialogue. Influencers can also be valuable allies in conflict management by amplifying positive messages and



countering negative perceptions. Partnering with influencers who resonate with Gen Z can provide credible endorsements and advocacy for the brand, rebuilding trust and credibility among their followers. Additionally, user-generated content (UGC) campaigns can be useful for managing conflicts, as they encourage users to share content reflecting positive experiences with the brand. This can leverage social proof and highlight community support, enhancing the brand's perception.

### **Engaging Through Interactive Experiences and Community Building**

Gen Z is a generation that values social consciousness and tends to support brands that share their values. Brands can improve their image and reduce negative perceptions during conflicts by implementing cause marketing initiatives that align with Gen Z's concerns. To establish a meaningful dialogue between brands and Gen Z, interactive experiences like live Q&A sessions and polls, along with interactive storytelling can be used. This provides an opportunity for open communication to address concerns and clarify misconceptions, resulting in stronger relationships and a better brand perception. Additionally, creating communities around shared interests or causes can foster open discussions, while demonstrating a commitment to transparency and responsiveness, ultimately enhancing brand perception among Gen Z.

### **Harnessing Real-Time Communication and Visual Storytelling in Conflict Management**

Brands ought to keep a close eye on their social media channels and act quickly in response to any issues or controversies that arise. Being proactive in addressing concerns can help mitigate negative perceptions and build trust with Gen Z. Additionally, visual storytelling is a powerful tool for

conveying messages and shaping perceptions within this demographic. By using compelling visuals and multimedia content, brands can effectively communicate their values, initiatives, and responses to conflicts. Visual storytelling not only evokes emotions but also aligns with Gen Z's preferences for engaging content, thus elevating brand perception in their eyes.

By understanding Gen Z's digital habits and values and implementing proactive PR strategies such as transparent communication, influencer partnerships, UGC campaigns, and interactive experiences, organizations can navigate conflicts successfully and build trust with this influential demographic. Through diligent measurement and evaluation, brands can continuously adapt and refine their PR efforts to resonate with Gen Z and uphold a favorable brand perception.

#### **Bio:**

Hello there! My name is Mila-Joselyn Alicea, but you can call me Josa. I thrive in the dynamic realms of digital marketing and public relations, where I have developed a set of skills to attract attention and encourage participation, particularly among the hard-to-reach Gen Z audience. As a professional in my field, I don't just market; I tell stories and strategize, with the ability to create narratives that connect with diverse groups of people. My knowledge in public relations goes beyond the basics and includes crafting captivating stories that stand out from the crowd and leave a lasting impression on journalists, influencers, and consumers alike. In today's digital age, it is essential to stand out from the crowd. Therefore, I am dedicated to being innovative, staying up-to-date with emerging trends, and pushing boundaries in the fields of digital marketing and public relations. With a passion for storytelling, I strive to make a lasting impact and leave my mark in the ever-evolving world of communication.



# Greenwashing Symphony: Can PR Silence Environmental Discord? — Alexander Chiejina



As green buzzwords fill the air, can Public Relations (PR) silence the growing dissonance of environmental harm, or will we tune into a symphony of authentic action for our planet? These are unanswered questions. Greenwashing, in its simplest form, is the act of misleading consumers about a product or company's environmental impact. Imagine a company selling bottled water in "eco-friendly" packaging. When you look closer, the actual bottle is still made from conventional plastic, which ends up in landfills and pollutes our oceans. This is a classic case of greenwashing – using superficial green features to mask the true environmental impact of the product. Now picture a clothing brand claiming to be "carbon-neutral." This might sound impressive, but if they're producing clothes in unsustainable factories, using excessive packaging, and promoting fast fashion trends, their "carbon-neutral" claim becomes questionable. They might be offsetting some emissions through carbon credits, but they're

neglecting the bigger picture of their environmental footprint. As PR practitioners, we hold the power to shape narratives and influence public perception. But in the face of a climate crisis, wielding this power carelessly becomes deception. In the face of the climate crisis, our responsibility stretches beyond crafting clever phrases. Greenwashing campaigns, though sugar-coated with green buzzwords, can leave a bitter aftertaste of environmental apathy and eroded trust.

## The Power of Authentic Storytelling

1. Patagonia's Worn Wear  
Patagonia, the outdoor apparel giant, turned the idea of "new is better" on its head. Their 'Worn Wear' campaign promotes repairing, reusing, and even buying used Patagonia gear. It's not just PR; it's an embedded principle, reflected in their product design and repair resources. The result? Reduced environmental impact, extended product lifecycles, and a loyal customer base resonating with Patagonia's

authentic commitment to sustainability.

2. Icelandair's Offset to Zero  
Icelandair took responsibility for its emissions head-on with its 'Offset to Zero' programme. Instead of simply buying carbon credits, they partnered with local reforestation projects, inviting customers to track progress and even donate directly. This transparent approach fosters trust and inspires travellers to choose a more environmentally conscious airline.

3. Unilever's Clean Future  
Unilever, the consumer goods giant, shifted its focus from just "cleaning homes" to "cleaning the planet." Their "Clean Future initiative" tackles plastic waste, promotes sustainable sourcing, and advocates for policy change. They did not shy away from challenges, demonstrating a commitment to action beyond PR campaigns.

4. Body Shop's Forever Against Animal Testing:  
The Body Shop's fight against animal testing is not just a marketing gimmick; it is woven into their very essence. They actively

campaign for legislative change, partner with animal rights groups, and even educate consumers about alternatives. This unwavering commitment and honest communication have cemented their reputation as ethical beauty pioneers.

#### 5. Empowering Youth Climate Activists

This movement empowers young people to use their voices for environmental change. They train teenagers in effective communication, storytelling, and media relations, enabling them to hold corporations and governments accountable. By amplifying youth voices, Purpose Disruptors demonstrate the power of PR to empower genuine grassroots change.

#### Conducting Positive Change

So, how do we, as PR professionals, avoid adding to the environmental noise pollution and instead conduct a genuine symphony of sustainability? Transparency: Ditch the greenwashed melodies and play the honest chords. Disclose environmental footprint, acknowledge shortcomings, and commit to measurable improvement.

Focus on Action: Words are fleeting, actions are lasting. Move beyond green claims and showcase concrete initiatives you are taking to reduce environmental impact. Partner with NGOs, invest in renewable energy, promote responsible production and consumption. Unilever's "Love Beauty, Love Planet" campaign is not just a slogan; it is a roadmap for reducing plastic waste across its product lines.

Authenticity is the Key: Greenwashing is like playing a pre-recorded symphony. Audiences crave genuine engagement. Let your environmental commitment stem from your company's core values, not just marketing strategies. Body Shop's "Forever Against Animal Testing" campaign resonates because it reflects their authentic dedication to animal welfare, woven into their very

fabric.

Embrace Collaboration: The climate crisis demands an orchestra, not soloists. Partner with other companies, environmental groups, and communities to amplify your impact and learn from each other. Dove's "Self-Esteem Project" partnered with educators and parents to tackle body image issues, demonstrating the power of collective action.

#### Lessons from the Real World

Remember, sustainability isn't just a marketing jingle; it's a responsibility we share as PR professionals. Let's stop silencing the discord with greenwashing and instead, use our skills to compose a symphony of genuine action and positive change. The audience is listening, and the planet deserves a performance worth applauding. Like Iceland's "Choose Glacier Water" initiative, public education campaigns can raise awareness and drive eco-conscious choices. Advocating for responsible policies, like Coca-Cola's support for extended producer responsibility laws, can create systemic change. In a nutshell, let's replace the Greenwashing Symphony with the Sustainability Symphony, where every note resonates with authenticity, action, and genuine commitment to our planet.

#### Bio:

Alexander Chiejina is a strategic communications professional with 13 years + of leadership experience in Strategic Communications, Stakeholder Management, Public Relations, and Media Management. His experience spans spearheading a wide array of managing operations, marketing and communication campaigns, and programmes across diverse industries including projects in Nigeria, Africa, and Globally.

As Nigeria HealthWatch's Strategic Content Lead, he oversees editorial, corporate communications, and production, ensuring that the organization resonates with its audience and amplifies the firm's brand's message.





## What have you done for me lately? — Obinna Inogbo



Dear Public Relations Entrepreneur, you're going to take a lot of insults, within reason, if you want to be a service provider. Some clients don't care that you got them interviews on CNN, BBC, and Channels Television in the last payment cycle. They don't care that you've boosted staff loyalty and morale through training, birthday acknowledgments, employee of the month/quarter/year plaques, and requests for purposeful hiring from different Nigerian geopolitical zones, sexes, and religious affiliations to achieve company national character. They don't care that several times a week, you text them pertinent political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental information to help them capitalize on their strengths to seize opportunities, improve on their weaknesses, and spot threats. They don't care that you made them join the regulatory body of their industry to avoid possible sanctions. That was in the last payment cycle! "So, what!" they exclaim. "I'll get someone else to do it!" Oh, and my personal favourite, "I can do your job, it's just that I don't have time." Yep, stick around long enough in Public Relations and you'll hear all these.

You must have a high level of emotional intelligence (EQ) to be a PR entrepreneur. You became one to change your life financially, socially, and publicly. EQ is so critical to success that it accounts for 58% of performance in all types of professions. Everyone has an ego, including you. Doing the job isn't

enough: you must treat the ego of someone paying you to provide services, very delicately. You can't be angry at them when they're angry at you. If you're emotionally intelligent, your anger won't last 48 hours: it will turn to compassion. I am not advocating remaining in a toxic environment to pay your bills; I'm advocating that there is no point complaining about a toxic environment while you've been engaged by a client – you must learn to navigate the situation.

There are several reasons why some clients think you're only as good as your last payment cycle: your work might have deteriorated. Listen to what they complain about the services you provide. Could you have done it better? Are you being arrogant because a non-professional PR person is advising you, a professional PR person? Sometimes the client cannot afford you anymore, but they won't tell you, so they'll start complaining and make the environment so toxic that you'll have to walk away, or they'll terminate your services. Sometimes the client isn't happy that they're not getting the credit for the turnaround in their company's reputation and bottom line so they'll fire you to prove that they can do it without you.

Sometimes they feel that they can get someone cheaper to do exactly what you do, so they'll tell you they no longer need you. Whatever the negative attitude you get from the client, give your best! If

after this they want to pull the trigger, you can leave knowing you did everything possible to make the business relationship work.

That other PR entrepreneur you admire who has several expensive retainers, pays their staff high salaries, and wins multiple individual and company awards has taken a lot of insults from those who pay them. And they still do! Seven to nine times out of ten, when they're insulted, they take it. They only respond one to three times out of ten, when the insult is too heavy.

Pick your battles to stay on the job. The CEO client knows you're stomaching all he or she throws at you. Whether they fire you or you leave of your own volition, they will remember how calm and respectful you were most of the time when they were bombing you. If they go around the block and hire others who they feel can do the job, and this isn't the case, some may call you back. For the ones who don't, they may still refer you to their contemporaries for a job. Don't be the one to burn the professional bridge. However, when the business relationship ends, always sign off with a thank you, wishing them all the best.

Lastly, never stop looking for new clients, no matter how many you have and how much you're being paid. Ten clients can turn to five very quickly.

### Bio:

Obinna Inogbo is the Principal PR Executive of Worktainment Limited, a Lagos, Nigeria-based PR agency. He started the business in 2017 and has had clients including Simi Drey and Kawai Technologies. In 2022 Worktainment won the Africa Finance Award for Most Customer-Focused PR and Brand Engagement Agency.

Worktainment was also nominated back-to-back for Best Innovation In PR at the Lagos PR Industry and Gala Awards in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Prior to his career in PR, Inogbo worked as a TV producer and screenwriter for 8 years.

## Volunteer Details



**Adeola Adetola**  
Marketing & Communications  
Business Partner, Trium



**Fatihah Ayinde**  
Founder/CEO, Flagscale PR (FSPR)



**Joyce Ofua**  
Corporate Communications Lead,  
Grooming People for Better Livelihood Centre  
(Grooming Centre)



**Oludolapo Adewale**  
Media and Communications Professional



**WINNY Uwagbale**  
Convener, Nigerian Volunteers Award  
(The NVA Project)



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