Public Relations and The Nigerian Police in The Post-#Endsars Era, Using the Rivers State Police Command

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Abstract
This study examined public relations and the Nigerian Police in the post-#EndSARS era, using the Rivers State Police Command as a case study. The study was guided by five specific objectives and five research questions. The study was anchored on Uses and Gratification Theory. A survey research design was adopted, with a population of 17,207 police officers of the Rivers State Police Command. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample of 391 officers was drawn through stratified random sampling across the Department of Operations, Department of Criminal Investigation, Department of Administration, Department of Intelligence and the Public Relations Department (PPRO). A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. Data were analysed using frequencies, simple percentages and weighted mean scores, with a criterion mean of 2.50. The findings revealed that the Rivers State Police Command has adopted various public relations strategies in the post-#EndSARS era; the public relations strategies are moderately effective; public relations plays a moderately positive role in building public trust; strategic public relations contributes to a reasonable extent to rebuilding the image, reputation and integrity of the Force. The study concluded that public relations is a necessary tool for institutional reform in the post-#EndSARS era. The study recommended, among others, that the Rivers State Police Command should sustain and diversify its public relations strategies, strengthen genuine two-way dialogue with citizens, back image-building efforts with verifiable corrective action, and that government should address the structural challenges of

inadequate funding, weak coordination and limited communication training within the Public Relations Department (PPRO).

***Keywords**: Nigerian Police, Post EndSARS, Public Relations, Rivers State Police Command.*

Introduction

The #EndSARS protests of October 2020 marked a pivotal turning point in the historical relationship between the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and the Nigerian public. Originally sparked by long-standing allegations of extrajudicial killings, torture, and extortion by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the movement quickly evolved into a national and global outcry against police brutality and systemic governance failures (Amnesty International, 2021). For decades, the image of the Nigerian police had been plagued by widespread perceptions of corruption, impunity, and abuse of power (Alemika, 2023). However, the intensity and digital mobilisation of #EndSARS exposed these deep-seated grievances more dramatically than ever before, forcing the state to confront its accountability deficit. In response, the government announced the disbandment of SARS, introduced panels of inquiry across states, and pledged to reform the policing system. Yet, despite these efforts, public scepticism about the sincerity and sustainability of these reforms persisted, indicating a significant rupture in trust between the police and the citizens they are mandated to protect (Ecoma, 2023). In the aftermath of #EndSARS, the Nigerian Police Force faced one of the most severe legitimacy crises in its history. Public trust in policing institutions deteriorated sharply, undermining community cooperation and compliance with law enforcement directives. According to Afrobarometer (2022), over 70% of Nigerians expressed low levels of trust in the police, citing corruption, brutality, and lack of accountability as key reasons. The crisis revealed not only operational inefficiencies but also communication failures, that is, how the police conveyed information, responded to criticism, and managed its public image. In this context, public relations (PR) emerged as a crucial instrument for institutional reform and image rebuilding. The police needed to not only act differently but also to communicate those actions transparently, empathetically, and strategically. The deployment of effective public relations mechanisms thus became central to the police's effort to re-establish credibility, restore confidence, and demonstrate accountability in the post-#EndSARS era (Inobemhe, 2022).

Public relations, in the context of law enforcement, goes beyond media relations or publicity; it encompasses strategic communication, community engagement, and relationship management that foster mutual understanding and trust (Coombs, 2017). Public relations has been around for as long as human society itself. However, the practice of the profession dates back to the early 20th century with an initial focus on press agency and publicity. Since then, rapid developments have occurred both in the conceptualisation and the practice of public relations, driven by a deeper appreciation of its relevance to individual, association and organisational performance. Modern definitions of public relations incorporate concepts of 'engagement' and 'relationship building' as a reflection of the instrumentality of the interplay between technological advances and social relationships to the success of public relations practice (Okafor & Malizu, 2014). Beyond media visibility, Olukotun (2024) noted that public relations in the post-#EndSARS period has also emphasised community engagement and relationship management as a means of restoring public confidence. The Nigerian Police have expanded community policing initiatives, town-hall meetings, and Police-Community Relations Committees (PCRCs) to facilitate dialogue and feedback between officers and citizens. Thus, the use of public relations by the Nigerian Police in the post-#EndSARS era represents both an opportunity for meaningful reform and a test of the institution's commitment to translating communication into sustained behavioral change (Olukotun,

2024).

Statement of the Problem

The #EndSARS movement of 2020 profoundly reshaped police–public relations across Nigeria, revealing systemic issues of distrust, accountability failure, and communication breakdown between law enforcement agencies and the citizens they serve. In Rivers State, an area historically characterised by political volatility, youth activism, and heightened security challenges, the protests underscored deep-rooted hostility toward the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). Although the federal government announced the disbandment of SARS and introduced several reform initiatives, residents of Rivers State continue to express low confidence in the police's integrity, fairness, and professionalism. The Rivers State Police Command has since intensified its public relations (PR) activities through radio sensitisation programmes, community outreach, social media campaigns, and public briefings to restore its damaged image. Yet, prevailing public attitudes suggest that these efforts have yielded minimal impact on citizen trust and cooperation. The continued perception of the police as oppressive, corrupt, and politically influenced raises concerns about the adequacy and effectiveness of the Command's public relations strategies in the post-#EndSARS period.

The core of the problem lies in the disconnect between the official public relations narratives of the Rivers State Police Command and the lived experiences of citizens. Despite ongoing communication efforts, reports of police brutality, harassment, and extortion persist across the state, often contradicting the Command's reform-oriented messages. This contradiction weakens the credibility of institutional communication and reinforces public cynicism toward law enforcement. Furthermore, the Command's public relations communication model appears to remain largely top-down, reactive, and event-driven rather than participatory, proactive, and community-centred (Olowookere, 2020; Inobemhe, 2022). The absence of feedback mechanisms and dialogic engagement limits opportunities for genuine relationship-building with critical community stakeholders such as youth groups, civil society organisations, and the media. Consequently, the Command's communication strategies may be perceived as defensive propaganda rather than sincere reform communication, thereby impeding efforts to achieve reconciliation and institutional legitimacy in Rivers State.

Technically, this situation points to a significant research gap concerning the structure, implementation, and effectiveness of public relations practices within the Rivers State Police Command in the aftermath of #EndSARS. While national-level analyses have explored police image crises in general terms, limited empirical attention has been given to state-level dynamics, where community contexts, policing patterns, and communication cultures vary widely. There is therefore a need to investigate whether the Command's public relations strategies are evidence-based, contextually relevant, and aligned with the principles of transparency and accountability. Without such inquiry, policy reforms may continue to focus on surface-level communication outputs rather than on sustainable relationship-building processes that rebuild citizen trust. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by critically examining the effectiveness of the Rivers State Police Command's public relations strategies in the post-#EndSARS era, assessing how these efforts influence public perception, trust, and cooperation within the state.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to carry out an investigation of public relations and Nigerian Police in the Post EndSars era: A study of the Rivers State Command. Specifically, the study sought to:

1.find out various public relations strategies adopted by Nigerian police in the Post-#EndSARS Era.

2.assess the effectiveness of public relations strategies employed by Nigerian police in the Post-#EndSARS Era.
3.examine the role of public relations in building public trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the post-#EndSARS era.

Research Questions

In line with specific objectives, the following research questions were raised to guide this study:
1.What are the various public relations strategies adopted by Nigerian police in the Post-#EndSARS Era?
2.How effective are the public relations strategies employed by Nigerian police in the Post-#EndSARS Era?
What is the role of public relations in building public trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the post-#EndSARS era?

Literature Reciew

Theoretical Framework

Image Restoration Theory

The Image Restoration Theory was developed by William L. Benoit in 1995 to explain how individuals and organizations respond to accusations or crises that threaten their reputation. The theory builds upon the foundations of rhetorical and communication studies, particularly the works on apologia and account-giving, and provides a systematic framework for understanding the strategies actors employ to repair their damaged image after public criticism. Benoit (1995) argues that since image and reputation are central to public credibility, organizations must engage in communicative actions to restore their legitimacy when faced with crises. The theory identifies five broad categories of image restoration strategies—denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (apology)—each designed to influence how the public perceives the organization's culpability and sincerity. In essence, the Image Restoration Theory underscores that effective crisis communication must align rhetorical strategies with behavioral reforms to achieve sustainable image recovery. Scholars have extended and critiqued Benoit's framework in various ways. Hearit (1999) expanded the theory by emphasizing the ethical dimension of image repair, arguing that moral responsibility and transparency are necessary for genuine restoration.

The key assumptions of the Image Restoration Theory provide a foundation for its practical application. First, communication is goal-oriented, and the primary goal of image restoration is to protect or rebuild reputation after it has been threatened. Second, an organization's image exists in the perception of its publics; thus, reputation recovery requires influencing how those publics interpret the crisis and the organization's response. Third, a perceived act of wrongdoing or offensive behavior is necessary to trigger image restoration efforts. Fourth, the choice of strategy depends on the organization's degree of responsibility, crisis severity, and the expectations of stakeholders. Fifth, successful image restoration is both rhetorical and behavioral—it requires not only persuasive communication but also tangible corrective actions that demonstrate sincerity and accountability. These assumptions make the theory especially relevant in the post-EndSARS era, where the Nigerian Police must combine public apologies, reforms, and transparent communication to rebuild public trust and restore institutional legitimacy.

Relevantly, the Image Restoration Theory aptly explains the relationship between Public Relations and the Nigerian Police in the Post-EndSARS era by providing a framework for understanding how the police can strategically rebuild public trust and credibility after the

reputational damage caused by the 2020 EndSARS protests. The theory emphasizes that when an institution's image is threatened by accusations of misconduct, abuse, or corruption, it must employ deliberate communication anbehavioural strategies—such as denial, apology, corrective action, and reducing offensiveness—to repair its public image. In the context of the Nigerian Police, public relations serve as the mechanism through which these image restoration strategies are implemented by promoting transparency, empathy, accountability, and reform-oriented messaging. Through press briefings, community engagement programs, social media communication, and partnerships with civil society, the police can demonstrate genuine commitment to change. Essentially, the Image Restoration Theory underscores that rebuilding the police's image in post-EndSARS Nigeria requires not only public apologies and public relations campaigns but also visible institutional reforms and consistent communication efforts that align with public expectations for justice, professionalism, and respect for human rights.

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory

The Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory was developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984 as part of their Excellence Theory of public relations. The theory posits that effective public relations should be based on mutual understanding, dialogue, and negotiation between an organization and its publics rather than one-way persuasion or manipulation. Unlike earlier models that emphasized information dissemination or image control, the two-way symmetrical model stresses balanced communication, where both parties influence each other to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argue that organizations should engage their stakeholders in open communication, actively listen to public concerns, and make necessary policy or behavioral adjustments in response to feedback. This model is regarded as the most ethical and effective form of public relations, fostering trust, legitimacy, and long-term cooperation between organizations and their audiences. Several scholars have contributed perspectives that reinforce or expand upon this theory. Grunig and White (1992) assert that symmetrical communication promotes organisational learning and responsiveness to societal expectations. Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) describe it as the foundation of "excellent public relations," especially in democratic contexts where institutions must remain accountable. Kent and Taylor (2002) emphasise that digital communication platforms can enhance two-way symmetrical communication by allowing real-time interaction and feedback between organisations and publics. Similarly, Molleda and Ferguson (2004) argued that the theory supports corporate social responsibility by ensuring that public opinion and ethical considerations guide organizational behavior. These scholars collectively highlight that the strength of the model lies in its emphasis on dialogue, transparency, and adaptation, which are essential for sustaining public trust. One of the key assumptions of the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory is that communication should be mutual and reciprocal, not manipulative or one-sided. Secondly, the theory assumes that organisations and publics both have the capacity to influence each other's attitudes and behaviours through dialogue. Thirdly, the theory assumes that effective public relations requires honesty, openness, and ethical engagement to build trust and legitimacy. Also, the theory assumes that conflict between an organisation and its publics can be resolved through negotiation and mutual understanding, rather than coercion or propaganda. The Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory explains Public Relations and the Nigerian Police in the Post-EndSARS Era by emphasising the need for mutual dialogue, transparency, and feedback-driven engagement between the police and the public to rebuild trust and legitimacy after the 2020 crisis. In this context, the Nigerian Police must shift from one-way, command-based communication to a more participatory model that encourages open interaction,

acknowledges citizens' grievances, and incorporates public input into policy and reform processes. Through platforms such as community town halls, media briefings, and social media dialogues, the police can demonstrate accountability, empathy, and responsiveness—core tenets of the two-way symmetrical model. This approach not only helps manage post-crisis image repair but also fosters sustainable peace and cooperation between law enforcement and the community. Ultimately, the theory underscores that effective public relations for the Nigerian Police in the post-EndSARS era must be built on reciprocal communication that balances institutional objectives with the expectations and rights of the citizens.

Conceptual Review

Public Relations Strategies

Public Relations (PR) strategies represent the deliberate, structured, and research-driven approaches adopted by organizations to shape public perception, manage stakeholder relationships, and achieve communication objectives. PR strategies differ depending on context, audience, and desired outcomes, but all aim to build mutual understanding, credibility, and trust between an organization and its publics. In Nigeria, particularly in the post-EndSARS era, such strategies have become increasingly vital for institutions like the Nigerian Police Force, which face challenges of image repair and public distrust. Below are ten comprehensive classifications of Public Relations strategies discussed in detail.

Media Relations Strategy: The first classification is the media relations strategy, which centers on establishing and maintaining positive relationships with journalists, editors, bloggers, and other media professionals. Media relations aim to ensure that an organization's message is accurately and favorably represented in the media. It involves activities such as press conferences, news releases, media interviews, and feature stories (Asemah, 2011). Effective media relations are crucial for shaping public perception and ensuring that the organization's narrative is not distorted. For example, the Nigerian Police Force frequently utilizes press briefings and media partnerships to clarify its policies and address public concerns, especially following crises like EndSARS. This strategy is fundamental because media outlets serve as both agenda setters and opinion shapers in the public domain.

Community Relations Strategy: The second classification is the community relations strategy, which emphasizes the development of positive relationships with local communities in which an organization operates. Community relations involve engaging in social initiatives, listening to community concerns, and demonstrating corporate citizenship through programs like infrastructure development, sponsorships, and youth empowerment. Nwosu (1996) posits that effective community relations enhance an organization's goodwill and help to prevent or mitigate community conflicts. For instance, corporations such as Shell and MTN Nigeria have used this strategy to strengthen their local legitimacy, while the Nigerian Police employ community engagement initiatives—such as Police-Community Relations Committees (PCRC)—to rebuild trust and encourage collaboration in crime prevention.

Nigerian Police

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is the principal law enforcement agency in Nigeria, constitutionally mandated to maintain law and order, protect lives and property, prevent and detect crime, and enforce all laws and regulations within the country. Established in 1930 through the merger of regional police units, the NPF operates under the supervision of the Nigeria Police Council and the Police Service Commission, with the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) serving as the head of the force. Structurally, the NPF is organized into zonal

commands, state commands, area commands, divisions, stations, and posts, ensuring hierarchical control and operational efficiency across the federation. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) and the Nigeria Police Act 2020 provide the legal framework for its existence and functions. Despite this comprehensive legal and organizational foundation, the Nigerian Police has faced enduring challenges relating to underfunding, inadequate training, poor welfare, corruption, and weak accountability mechanisms, which have adversely affected its efficiency and public image (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2022).

Rivers State Police Command

The Rivers State Police Command is one of the strategic state commands of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), operating under the constitutional mandate of maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and protecting lives and property within Rivers State. Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region, is economically and politically significant due to its oil and gas resources, dense urban population, and history of political activism. These features make policing in the state particularly complex, requiring a command structure that is operationally robust and administratively adaptive. The Rivers State Police Command operates under the authority of the Inspector-General of Police through the Commissioner of Police, who serves as the chief law enforcement officer in the state (Nigeria Police Force, 2020). Structurally, the Rivers State Police Command is organized into area commands, divisions, and specialized departments to ensure effective coverage of both urban and rural areas. The Command comprises key departments such as Administration, Operations, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Intelligence, and the Police Public Relations Office (PPRO), alongside specialized units including anti-kidnapping, anti-cultism, gender desk, and community policing units. This structure aligns with the national organizational framework of the Nigerian Police Force and is designed to address the peculiar security challenges of Rivers State, including cult-related violence, armed robbery, oil theft, political unrest, and communal conflicts (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2017). In recent years, particularly following the #EndSARS protests of 2020, the Rivers State Police Command has come under increased public scrutiny regarding professionalism, accountability, and community relations. The EndSARS movement exposed long-standing grievances related to police brutality, excessive use of force, and poor police–citizen engagement across Nigeria, with Rivers State experiencing significant protests and security challenges. In response, the Command has implemented reforms consistent with national police directives, including the strengthening of community policing initiatives, human rights desks, internal disciplinary mechanisms, and more proactive public relations and media engagement through the PPRO (Amnesty International, 2021; Nigeria Police Force, 2021).

Nigerian Police Force in the Post-EndSARS Era

In the aftermath of the EndSARS protests of 2020, the Nigeria Police Force finds itself at a pivotal juncture: one which demands not only operational reform but also a strategic recalibration of its relationship with the public. Historically, the NPF has been the principal law enforcement agency in Nigeria, charged with maintenance of law and order, protection of life and property, prevention and detection of crime, and the enforcement of federal laws (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999/2020). The protests—which originated from widespread allegations of human rights abuses, extortion and extrajudicial killings by the now-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)—revealed deep structural weaknesses in policing, accountability, and public trust. The NPF, consequently, has been under intensifying pressure to rebuild legitimacy through legal reform, institutional change, and communicative transparency. The passage of the Nigeria Police Act (2020) was celebrated as a landmark

statutory reform, introducing greater oversight, community-policing provisions, and rights protections (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation [FMINO], 2020). However, while the legal framework exists, its practical implementation remains uneven, and subsequent judgments have even declared aspects of the Act unconstitutional—exposing the complexity of institutional reform in a federal context (*Punch* Newspapers, 2020).

Despite the legislative ambitions, the challenge of restoring public trust remains acute. Surveys and research conducted in the post-EndSARS period show persistent skepticism among youths and citizens regarding the NPF's accountability, transparency and commitment to behavioral change (Nwosu, Abunike, Onwuchekwe & Onuchukwu, 2024). For example, one study found that even three years after the protests, many young Nigerians in the South-East region perceived very little improvement in police accountability (Nwosu et al., 2024). This trust deficit has operational implications: low public confidence reduces cooperation with policing efforts, hinders intelligence sharing, and obstructs community-policing models which rely on reciprocal relations. Moreover, the proliferation of social media activism and citizen documentation means that public-relations efforts by the NPF are scrutinised more intensively than ever. The institution must therefore engage not only in reforming acts and policies, but also in authentic, transparent, and sustained communication that aligns public perceptions with institutional behaviour. Operationally, the post-EndSARS era also requires the NPF to embrace strategic public-relations (PR) practices that go beyond mere image repair. The traditional one-way broadcast of "we are reforming" messages is insufficient. Instead, the force must adopt a dialogic, two-way approach—listening to community concerns, providing feedback, and adapting behaviour accordingly. For example, the deployment of new community-policing units, public complaints hotlines, and social-media engagement platforms can signal openness—but these must be matched by clear outcomes: investigations, prosecutions, transparent case-reporting, and visible behavioural change. Without this alignment, PR risks being seen as a cosmetic veneer rather than substantive change (Babale & Adelakun, 2024). Indeed, credible reform would link PR messaging with institutional accountability, training, community-based partnerships, and digital engagement strategies that reflect the real concerns of citizen-stakeholders. If the NPF harnesses this opportunity effectively, it can transition from a legacy of crisis to a modern, legitimate, and community-embedded policing institution in Nigeria's evolving democratic context.

Empirical Review

Babaleye and Adelakun (2024) assessed public relations strategies in crisis management during the 2020 #ENDSARS Protest and "Lekki Shooting" in Lagos, Nigeria. Data were gathered using quantitative and qualitative research methods. Research instrument was administered on 353 students of four universities, while four key informants from the public sector were interviewed. Findings showed that the public relations strategies deployed by Lagos State Government were Community Relations (Mean = 2.44), Media Relations (Mean = 2.43), Corporate Social Responsibility (Mean = 2.28) and Government Relations (Mean = 2.27) and they were found to be effective. Omoyeni (2024) explored the interconnections between EndSARS protests and other protests (e.g., End Hunger) to understand the broader sociopolitical drivers of citizen distrust and the limits of police public messaging. Using mixed methods—surveying protesters and analysing social media mobilisation—the study showed that PR narratives that focused narrowly on operational reassurances failed to resonate because protesters' grievances were structural (economic marginalisation, governance failures). Tiwa (2024) examined the consequences of institutional distrust for policing effectiveness, with a specific focus on post-EndSARS Nigeria. The study found statistically significant negative associations between distrust in the police and key policing outcomes such as reporting crime, providing tips, and participating in community policing.

The paper concluded that the trust deficit sparked by EndSARS has concrete operational costs for policing and recommended that PR strategies be reoriented toward rebuilding procedural fairness—transparent investigations, publicised corrective actions, and independent oversight—to restore cooperative behaviours.

Kalu, Igyuve and Akase (2024) assessed public perception of the role of public relations strategies for peace-building during political activities in Nigeria. The population of the study were electorates in the six Areas Councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The study was supported by the excellent theory. A quantitative research approach was used. The findings revealed among others that public relations strategies used in peace-building during the 2023 general elections in FCT include dialogue, mediation, negotiation, arbitration, community relations, intercession, intervention, inquest, conciliation, adjudication, use of the mass media, public view and propaganda devices

Odigbo, Samaila and Okonkwo (2024) undertook a critical appraisal of the public relations strategies employed by major international oil companies for crisis management in Nigeria. Results indicate that: there is significant correlation between the public relations crisis management tools of the IOCs and the perceptions of their target publics; and the level of mutual understanding between them and their host communities. .

Babaleye and Adelakun (2024) carried out assessment of public relations strategies in crisis management during the 2020 #ENDSARS Protest and "Lekki Shooting" in Lagos, Nigeria. Findings showed that the public relations strategies deployed by Lagos State Government were Community Relations, Media Relations, Corporate Social Responsibility and Government Relations and they were found to be effective. However, Community Relations and Media Relations strategies were most effective. the goodwill of the people to prevent future breakdown of law and order.

Heavens and Emenike (2024) examined the use of public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria and its impact on political communication. The study concluded that while public relations is critical to the success of political campaigns in Nigeria, it must be used ethically and responsibly. Irene (2023) investigated the link between the #EndSARS protest and policing strategies in Nigeria. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data from 194 randomly selected respondents from a population of Police officers. Findings from the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the #EndSARS protest and policing strategies in Nigeria. Inobemhe, Garba, Udeh and Santas (2023) undertook a nationwide discourse analysis of the Nigeria Police Force's public relations and image-management strategies after the #EndSARS protests, aiming to identify PR techniques used and evaluate their effectiveness. The study found that the NPF deployed a range of image-redeeming tactics (press statements, social media posts, community outreach), but these were largely reactive, formulaic, and frequently perceived as inconsistent with citizens' lived experiences.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design. The survey research design is chosen because it enables the researcher to select samples from a large population. Also, it permits the researcher to study small sample and later generalized the findings to the whole population. The population of this study consisted of seventeen thousand, two hundred and seven (17,207) police officers of the Rivers State Police Command as at 2025. This information was obtained from the Rivers State Police Command (2025). The sample size (S) for this current study was ascertained using Taro Yamane (1967) formula (see formula 1). The Taro Yamane (1967) formula is an established and widely accepted statistical method for determining sample size in social science and behavioural research, particularly where the population is known and finite. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

$$= \frac{17,207}{1 + 17,207 * (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{17,207}{1 + 17,207 * (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{17,207}{1 + 43.0175}$$

$$n = \frac{17,207}{44.0175}$$

n = 390.9127

n ≈ 391

The most appropriate sampling technique for this study is a stratified random sampling technique, as it allows for fair representation of police officers across key departments of the Rivers State Police Command that are directly involved in public relations, operations, intelligence, and administrative functions in the post-EndSARS era. Structured questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Weighted mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyse responses obtained from the Likert-scale items in the questionnaire. Numerical values will be assigned to the response categories as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The criterion mean was computed as the average of the assigned values, resulting in a benchmark of 2.50. Decisions on each research question was based on this criterion mean: any item or cluster of items with a mean score of 2.50 or above was interpreted as agreement and accepted, while mean scores below 2.50 was interpreted as disagreement and rejected.

Data Presentation

Table: Public Relations Strategies Adopted by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	WMS	REMARK
1	The Rivers State Police Command uses social media platforms (Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram) to communicate with the public in the post-#EndSARS era.	158 (41.6%)	149 (39.2%)	42 (11.1%)	31 (8.2%)	3.14	Agreed
2	The Command organises press briefings and official statements to clarify police actions and counter misinformation.	139 (36.6%)	166 (43.7%)	48 (12.6%)	27 (7.1%)	3.10	Agreed
3	The Command engages in community policing initiatives and town-hall meetings to build relationships with citizens.	121 (31.8%)	171 (45.0%)	55 (14.5%)	33 (8.7%)	3.00	Agreed

4	The Command uses public enlightenment campaigns on citizens' rights and crime prevention to improve public understanding.	134 (35.3%)	158 (41.6%)	58 (15.3%)	30 (7.9%)	3.04	Agreed
5	The Command has established complaint-handling mechanisms such as the Police Complaint Response Unit (PCRU) to receive public feedback.	112 (29.5%)	179 (47.1%)	61 (16.1%)	28 (7.4%)	2.99	Agreed
	Grand Mean					**3.05**	**Agreed**

SA = Strongly Agree (4 points), A = Agree (3 points), D = Disagree (2 points), SD = Strongly Disagree (1 point), WMS = Weighted Mean Score.

The results showed showed that the respondents agreed with all the questionnaire items posed to answer research question one, with a grand mean of 3.05, indicating the various public relations strategies adopted by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era.

Table 2: Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies Employed by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	WMS	REMARK
6	The public relations strategies adopted by the Command have improved citizens' perception of the police.	96 (25.3%)	164 (43.2%)	78 (20.5%)	42 (11.1%)	2.83	Agreed
7	Social media engagement by the Command has increased public awareness of police reform initiatives.	118 (31.1%)	167 (43.9%)	62 (16.3%)	33 (8.7%)	2.97	Agreed
8	Press briefings and official statements have reduced the spread of misinformation about police activities.	101 (26.6%)	158 (41.6%)	81 (21.3%)	40 (10.5%)	2.84	Agreed
9	Community policing initiatives have strengthened cooperation between the police and residents.	109 (28.7%)	171 (45.0%)	65 (17.1%)	35 (9.2%)	2.93	Agreed
10	The Command's public relations efforts have been more proactive than reactive in the post-#EndSARS era.	88 (23.2%)	149 (39.2%)	92 (24.2%)	51 (13.4%)	2.72	Agreed
	Grand Mean					**2.86**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

SA = Strongly Agree (4 points), A = Agree (3 points), D = Disagree (2 points), SD = Strongly Disagree (1 point), WMS = Weighted Mean Score.

The showed the respondents agreed with all the questionnaire items posed to answer research question two, with a grand mean of 2.86, indicating the effectiveness of the public relations strategies employed by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era.

Table 3: Public Relations in Building Public Trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the Post-#EndSARS Era

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	WMS	REMARK
11	Public relations activities of the Command have contributed to rebuilding trust between the police and the public.	114 (30.0%)	176 (46.3%)	58 (15.3%)	32 (8.4%)	2.98	Agreed
12	Transparent communication by the police has reduced public scepticism about police operations.	97 (25.5%)	162 (42.6%)	79 (20.8%)	42 (11.1%)	2.83	Agreed
13	Dialogic engagement (two-way communication) between the police and citizens has improved mutual understanding.	121 (31.8%)	169 (44.5%)	56 (14.7%)	34 (8.9%)	2.99	Agreed
14	Public relations has helped demonstrate accountability of the Command to the citizens of Rivers State.	103 (27.1%)	171 (45.0%)	68 (17.9%)	38 (10.0%)	2.89	Agreed
15	Feedback mechanisms established by the Command have given citizens a stronger voice in police reforms.	95 (25.0%)	158 (41.6%)	80 (21.1%)	47 (12.4%)	2.79	Agreed
	Grand Mean					**2.90**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

SA = Strongly Agree (4 points), A = Agree (3 points), D = Disagree (2 points), SD = Strongly Disagree (1 point), WMS = Weighted Mean Score.

Table 3 showed that the respondents agreed with all the questionnaire items posed to answer research question three, with a grand mean of 2.90, indicating the role of public relations in building public trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the Post-#EndSARS Era.

Discussion of Findings

Public Relations Strategies Adopted by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era

The findings emanating from this study indicated that the Rivers State Police Command has adopted various public relations strategies in the post-#EndSARS era, as shown by a grand mean of 3.05, which exceeds the decision benchmark of 2.50. Across the five questionnaire items, respondents agreed that the Command uses social media platforms, press briefings, community policing initiatives, public enlightenment campaigns, and complaint-handling mechanisms such as the Police Complaint Response Unit (PCRU) to engage the public. This finding is consistent with Babaleye and Adelakun (2024), who found that security institutions deployed community relations, media relations and government relations strategies during the #EndSARS crisis, with community relations and media relations emerging as the most visible. It also aligns with Kalu, Igyuve and Akase (2024), who found that security and government institutions in Nigeria rely on a broad spread of communication tools, including dialogue, mediation and use of the mass media, to manage public perception. Theoretically, this finding is well explained by the Uses and Gratification Theory, which holds that the Command's active use of social media and press briefings is a deliberate attempt to meet the

public's informational and surveillance needs. It is also explained by the Agenda-Setting Theory, which suggests that by consistently communicating its reform actions through multiple channels, the Command seeks to shape what the public thinks about and discusses regarding policing in Rivers State.

Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies Employed by the Nigerian Police in the Post-#EndSARS Era

The findings emanating from this study indicated that the public relations strategies employed by the Rivers State Police Command are only moderately effective in the post-#EndSARS era, with a grand mean of 2.86. Although this is above the criterion mean of 2.50 and therefore accepted, it is noticeably lower than the grand mean recorded for the adoption of strategies, suggesting a gap between the existence of public relations strategies and their actual impact. Respondents were less convinced that these strategies have substantially improved citizens' perception of the police or that the Command's communication posture has shifted decisively from reactive to proactive. This finding resonates with Omoyeni (2024), who found that police public relations narratives that focus narrowly on operational reassurances fail to resonate where the underlying grievances are structural, such as economic marginalisation and governance failures. It is also consistent with Tiwa (2024), who found that institutional distrust arising from EndSARS has concrete operational costs that communication alone cannot easily reverse. The Image Restoration Theory explains this finding well: Benoit's framework holds that image repair strategies are only effective when backed by genuine corrective action and perceived sincerity; where such action is absent or inconsistent, as appears to be partly the case in Rivers State, the restorative effect of communication is blunted.

Role of Public Relations in Building Public Trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the Post-#EndSARS Era

The findings emanating from this study indicated that public relations plays a positive role in building public trust in the Nigerian Police Force in the post-#EndSARS era, as shown by a grand mean of 2.90. Respondents agreed that public relations activities have contributed to rebuilding trust, that transparent communication has reduced scepticism, and that dialogic engagement has improved mutual understanding between the police and citizens, though agreement was again more moderate than strong. This aligns with Tiwa (2024), who recommended that public relations strategies be reoriented toward procedural fairness, transparent investigations and independent oversight in order to restore cooperative behaviour between citizens and the police. It is also consistent with Odigbo et al. (2024), who found a significant correlation between crisis-management communication tools and the level of mutual understanding achieved with target publics. The Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Theory provides strong theoretical grounding for this finding, as it holds that trust is rebuilt not through one-way persuasive messaging but through genuine dialogue in which the organisation also listens and adjusts its conduct in response to public feedback, which is precisely the mechanism respondents appear to be rewarding with moderate but real gains in trust.

Conclusion

This study examined public relations and the Nigerian Police in the post-#EndSARS era, with particular reference to the Rivers State Police Command. The study concluded that the Command has, in response to the legitimacy crisis triggered by the #EndSARS protests, adopted a fairly wide range of public relations strategies spanning digital media engagement, press briefings, community policing and formal complaint-handling mechanisms. However,

the effectiveness of these strategies, their contribution to rebuilding public trust, and their impact on the Command's image, reputation and integrity remain only moderate, constrained by the persistence of the very conduct, brutality, extortion and bureaucratic unresponsiveness, that the communication efforts are meant to help overcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were put forward by the researcher:

1.The Rivers State Police Command should sustain and diversify its public relations strategies by deepening its presence on social media, expanding community policing initiatives, and institutionalising regular press briefings, ensuring that these channels are not one-off reform gestures but a permanent feature of how the Command communicates with the public.

2.To close the gap between the adoption and the effectiveness of public relations strategies, the Command should invest in continuous monitoring and evaluation of its communication campaigns, using feedback from town-hall meetings, social media analytics and the Police Complaint Response Unit (PCRU) to adjust messaging and tactics in real time rather than relying on fixed, top-down communication plans.

3.The Command should strengthen genuine two-way dialogue with citizens, youth groups, civil society organisations and the media, moving beyond informational broadcasting to platforms that allow citizens to raise concerns and receive visible, timely responses, as this is central to rebuilding public trust in the post-#EndSARS era.

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