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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN FOSTERING POSITIVE EMPLOYEE RELATIONS: A QUALITATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations by exploring how strategic communication influences relationships between management and employees. The study was motivated by the increasing need for organizations to build harmonious workplaces characterized by trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. Specifically, the study examined the role of public relations in promoting effective internal communication, building employee trust, enhancing employee engagement, and strengthening organizational commitment. The study was anchored on the Relationship Management Theory developed by Ledingham and Bruning (1998), which emphasizes that effective public relations is built on mutual understanding, trust, dialogue, and long-term relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. A qualitative research design was adopted using qualitative secondary data analysis. Relevant data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and other credible academic publications. The collected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to public relations and employee relations. The findings revealed that strategic public relations plays a significant role in fostering positive employee relations through transparent internal communication, employee participation, trust-building, and effective relationship management. The study further found that organizations with effective public relations practices experience higher employee engagement, stronger organizational commitment, improved workplace cooperation, and fewer employee–management conflicts. The study concludes that public relations is a strategic management function that contributes significantly to creating healthy and productive workplace relationships. It recommends that organizations should strengthen internal communication, encourage employee participation, and adopt relationship-based public relations strategies to improve employee relations and enhance organizational performance.

Keywords: Public relations, employee relations, internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, organizational commitment, Relationship Management Theory.

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Introduction

Employees are one of the most valuable assets of any organization because they contribute directly to the achievement of organizational goals and long-term sustainability. The quality of the relationship between an organization and its employees significantly influences employee motivation, productivity, job satisfaction, commitment, and overall organizational performance. Positive employee relations are characterized by mutual trust, effective communication, cooperation, and respect between management and employees. Organizations that maintain healthy employee relations are better positioned to create a conducive work environment, reduce workplace conflicts, improve employee morale, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

In today's dynamic and highly competitive business environment, organizations can no longer rely solely on financial incentives to maintain productive relationships with their employees. Employees increasingly expect open communication, transparency, recognition, participation in decision-making, and opportunities to express their views. Meeting these expectations requires organizations to adopt effective communication strategies that encourage dialogue, build trust, and strengthen relationships. Consequently, maintaining positive employee relations has become a strategic priority for organizations seeking to improve performance and retain a committed workforce (Theaker, 2024).

Public relations have evolved beyond its traditional role of managing an organization's external image to become a strategic management function that also focuses on internal stakeholders, particularly employees. Through strategic internal communication, relationship management, employee engagement programmes, and trust-building initiatives, public relations helps create an environment where employees feel informed, valued, and involved in organizational activities. Effective public relations facilitate two-way communication between management and an employee, encourage mutual understanding, reduce communication barriers, and promote a culture of openness and collaboration (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Verčič & Men, 2023).

One of the primary responsibilities of public relations is to strengthen internal communication,

which serves as the foundation for positive employee relations. When employees receive timely, accurate, and transparent information about organizational policies, objectives, and decisions, they are more likely to develop confidence in management and demonstrate higher levels of trust, engagement, and organizational commitment. Research has consistently shown that organizations with effective internal communication systems experience improved employee satisfaction, stronger organizational identification, and healthier workplace relationships (Kim et al., 2021; Men et al., 2023).

The importance of public relations in fostering positive employee relations has become even more evident in recent years due to rapid technological advancement, digital communication, hybrid work arrangements, workforce diversity, and changing employee expectations. These developments have transformed the way organizations communicate with their employees, making strategic communication more important than ever before. Employees now expect regular feedback, inclusive communication, and opportunities to participate in organizational processes. As a result, public relations practitioners are increasingly expected to develop communication strategies that promote transparency, employee engagement, and organizational trust while strengthening relationships between management and employees (Kim & Lim, 2024).

In Nigeria, many organizations continue to experience challenges such as ineffective internal communication, declining employee trust, low engagement, industrial disputes, and weak relationships between management and employees. These challenges often reduce employee commitment, lower productivity, and negatively affect organizational performance. Although several organizations have introduced internal communication initiatives to address these issues, many have yet to fully recognize the strategic role of public relations in fostering a positive and collaborative work environment. This situation highlights the need for organizations to integrate public relations into their employee relations strategies to build stronger relationships and enhance organizational effectiveness.

Although previous studies have examined internal communication, employee engagement,

organizational commitment, and employee trust, relatively few have comprehensively explored how these dimensions collectively explain the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations, particularly through qualitative evidence synthesis. This study therefore seeks to examine the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations by synthesizing existing scholarly literature. The findings are expected to provide a clearer understanding of how strategic public relations practices contribute to healthier employee–management relationships and improved organizational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Employees are central to the success of every organization, and maintaining positive employee relations is essential for achieving organizational effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Positive employee relations promote trust, cooperation, job satisfaction, and commitment, all of which contribute to improved organizational performance. However, many organizations continue to experience challenges such as poor internal communication, declining employee trust, low employee engagement, weak organizational commitment, and frequent workplace conflicts. These challenges often undermine employees' confidence in management, reduce productivity, and negatively affect organizational growth (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Public relations are widely recognized as a strategic management function that facilitates effective communication and relationship building between organizations and their stakeholders, including employees. Through transparent communication, employee engagement initiatives, and relationship management strategies, public relations is expected to foster trust, strengthen organizational commitment, and promote harmonious employee–management relationships. Despite these expectations, evidence from the literature suggests that many organizations still pay greater attention to external public relations while giving inadequate attention to internal communication and employee relationship management (Verčič & Men, 2023; Kim & Lim, 2024).

Although several studies have examined internal communication, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and employee trust as separate concepts, relatively few have provided a comprehensive understanding of how these

dimensions collectively explain the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations. In addition, most previous studies relied predominantly on quantitative research methods, with limited qualitative evidence synthesizing existing knowledge on the subject. This creates a gap in the literature that requires further attention.

It is against this background that this study examines the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations through a qualitative review of existing literature. By synthesizing current empirical and theoretical evidence, the study seeks to provide a broader understanding of how strategic public relations practices contribute to healthy employee–management relationships and improved organizational effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations through a review of contemporary literature.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the role of public relations in promoting effective internal communication within organizations.
2. assess the influence of public relations on employee trust and positive employee relations.
3. evaluate the contribution of public relations to employee engagement and organizational commitment.
4. review contemporary literature on the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations, with particular emphasis on the Nigerian context.

Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

Concept of Public Relations

Public relations have become an indispensable management function in contemporary organizations because it facilitates effective communication and builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. Although public relations were traditionally associated with media relations and the management of corporate image, its scope has expanded considerably over the years. Today, it is recognized as a strategic management function that supports organizational decision-making, promotes stakeholder engagement, manages organizational reputation, and strengthens relationships with both external and internal publics.

This shift reflects the growing realization that organizational success depends not only on maintaining a positive public image but also on cultivating strong relationships with employees, customers, investors, government agencies, and the wider community (Theaker, 2024).

The concept of public relations has been defined differently by scholars and professional bodies, reflecting its broad and evolving nature. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2023) describes public relations as the deliberate and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill, mutual understanding, and positive relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. Similarly, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA, 2012) defines public relations as a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Although these definitions differ in emphasis, they share a common view that communication and relationship management are the foundation of effective public relations practice.

Scholars have also emphasized the managerial role of public relations in organizational success. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) argue that the effectiveness of public relations should not be measured solely by publicity or media coverage but by the quality of the relationships an organization develops with its stakeholders. Their Relationship Management Theory shifted the focus of public relations from information dissemination to relationship building, making communication a continuous process of dialogue, understanding, and mutual benefit. This perspective has become increasingly relevant as organizations operate in environments where trust, transparency, and stakeholder participation are essential for long-term success.

In recent years, public relations have increasingly focused on employees as one of the organization's most strategic stakeholders. Employees are not merely recipients of organizational messages; they are ambassadors of the organization's values and reputation. Their attitudes, behaviours, and commitment significantly influence organizational performance and public perception. Consequently, organizations now recognize that effective public relations begin within the organization through strategic internal communication, employee engagement, and relationship management. Verčič and Men (2023) argue that organizations with effective internal communication systems

experience higher levels of employee engagement, trust, and organizational commitment because employees feel informed, respected, and involved in organizational activities.

This changing role of public relations is particularly important in today's workplace, where technological advancements, digital communication platforms, hybrid work arrangements, and changing employee expectations have transformed organizational communication. Employees now expect timely information, opportunities to participate in decision-making, and transparent leadership. Public relations practitioners therefore play a crucial role in designing communication strategies that encourage dialogue, reduce misinformation, manage organizational change, and strengthen relationships between management and employees. Kim and Lim (2024) observed that strategic internal communication significantly enhances employee trust and strengthens employee–organization relationships, particularly during periods of organizational uncertainty and change.

Within the Nigerian context, the strategic importance of public relations has become increasingly evident across both public and private sector organizations. Nigerian organizations operate in an environment characterized by economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, workforce diversity, and increasing employee expectations. These realities have made effective communication and relationship management essential for organizational stability and performance. Despite this growing importance, many organizations in Nigeria still view public relations primarily as a tool for managing external image and media publicity, while comparatively less attention is given to its role in managing internal stakeholders. This narrow perception often results in weak communication between management and employees, reduced employee trust, low engagement, and workplace conflicts that could otherwise be minimized through effective public relations practices (Sambe, 2008).

Furthermore, the growing recognition of employee-centred management has reinforced the importance of integrating public relations into organizational leadership and human resource practices. Effective public relations contributes to creating a work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to organizational goals.

Through transparent communication, feedback mechanisms, recognition programmes, and employee participation, organizations can build stronger relationships with their workforce and improve overall organizational performance. This demonstrates that public relations is no longer limited to protecting organizational reputation but has become a strategic tool for fostering cooperation, commitment, and sustainable organizational growth.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that public relations extend beyond managing an organization's public image to building and sustaining productive relationships with all stakeholders, especially employees. By promoting effective communication, trust, participation, and mutual understanding, public relations creates the conditions necessary for healthy workplace relationships. Since the ultimate goal of these communication efforts is to establish a harmonious relationship between management and employees, it is important to examine the concept of employee relations, which is discussed in the next section.

Concept of Employee Relations

Employee relations remain one of the most important aspects of organizational management because they determine the quality of interaction between employers and employees. In every organization, employees are the driving force behind productivity, innovation, and service delivery. However, their ability to contribute effectively depends largely on the nature of the relationship that exists between them and management. Where employees feel respected, fairly treated, and adequately informed, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards their work and demonstrate greater commitment to organizational goals. Conversely, poor employee relations often result in low morale, frequent conflicts, absenteeism, industrial disputes, and reduced productivity. For this reason, organizations increasingly recognize employee relations as a strategic factor for achieving sustainable organizational success (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

The concept of employee relations has evolved over the years. Traditionally, it focused mainly on the relationship between employers, employees, and labour unions, with emphasis on collective bargaining and conflict resolution. Contemporary perspectives, however, extend beyond industrial relations to include all organizational policies and

practices that promote cooperation, communication, trust, employee participation, and mutual respect. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), employee relations encompass the processes through which organizations establish and maintain positive working relationships with employees while balancing organizational objectives with employee welfare. Similarly, Bratton and Gold (2022) view employee relations as the management of workplace relationships in ways that encourage collaboration, fairness, and organizational commitment. These perspectives suggest that employee relations are not limited to resolving workplace disputes but also involve creating an environment where employees can perform effectively and feel valued.

In today's knowledge-driven economy, organizations can no longer rely solely on salaries and employment benefits to maintain a committed workforce. Employees now expect open communication, recognition, opportunities for career development, participation in decision-making, and leadership that values their contributions. As these expectations continue to evolve, organizations are compelled to adopt management practices that strengthen trust and foster meaningful relationships with employees. This shift has transformed employee relations from a reactive function into a proactive management strategy aimed at improving employee well-being and organizational performance.

An important feature of positive employee relations is effective communication. Communication enables employees to understand organizational goals, policies, expectations, and changes while also providing management with valuable feedback from employees. When communication is transparent, timely, and interactive, misunderstandings are minimized, trust is strengthened, and employees are more willing to support organizational decisions. In contrast, ineffective communication often creates uncertainty, rumours, and dissatisfaction, which may negatively affect employee morale and productivity. This explains why communication is widely regarded as the foundation of successful employee relations (Welch & Jackson, 2019).

Another important element of employee relations is trust. Trust develops when employees believe that management is honest, fair, competent, and genuinely concerned about their welfare. Employees who trust their leaders are more likely to cooperate, embrace organizational changes, and remain committed to their responsibilities.

Closely related to trust are employee engagement and organizational commitment. Employees who are actively engaged in organizational activities tend to develop a stronger emotional attachment to their organizations, resulting in improved performance, reduced turnover intentions, and higher levels of job satisfaction. Consequently, positive employee relations are reflected not only in the absence of workplace conflict but also in the presence of collaboration, mutual respect, shared commitment, and a positive organizational climate.

Within the Nigerian context, maintaining positive employee relations remains a major challenge for many organizations. Issues such as inadequate communication, perceived unfairness, delayed promotion, poor welfare packages, leadership challenges, and limited employee participation in decision-making have contributed to strained relationships between management and employees in both public and private organizations. These challenges have often resulted in industrial disputes, employee dissatisfaction, and declining organizational performance. Scholars such as Sambe (2008) argue that many of these problems can be reduced when organizations adopt strategic communication practices that encourage dialogue, transparency, and employee involvement. This underscores the importance of viewing employee relations as a shared responsibility involving management, employees, human resource professionals, and public relations practitioners.

Public relations plays a crucial role in strengthening employee relations because it provides the communication framework through which organizations build trust, encourage participation, and maintain harmonious relationships with employees. Through planned communication programmes, employee feedback systems, recognition initiatives, and conflict management strategies, public relations practitioners help create a workplace where employees feel heard, respected, and motivated. As organizations continue to operate in increasingly competitive and dynamic environments, the ability to maintain positive employee relations through effective communication has become a strategic necessity rather than an administrative responsibility.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that positive employee relations cannot be achieved without effective communication between management and employees.

Since communication forms the foundation upon which trust, cooperation, and organizational commitment are built, it is necessary to examine the role of public relations in facilitating internal communication, which is discussed in the next section.

Public Relations and Internal Communication

Internal communication is widely recognized as one of the most important functions of public relations because it serves as the primary channel through which organizations establish and sustain meaningful relationships with their employees. Every organization depends on the effective exchange of information to coordinate activities, communicate policies, implement decisions, and achieve its objectives. Consequently, the success of an organization is influenced not only by what it communicates to external stakeholders but also by how effectively it communicates with its employees. Employees who receive accurate, timely, and relevant information are more likely to understand organizational goals, embrace organizational changes, and contribute meaningfully to organizational success.

Internal communication refers to the planned and continuous exchange of information, ideas, and feedback between management and employees to promote mutual understanding and organizational effectiveness. According to Welch and Jackson (2019), internal communication involves all formal and informal communication processes that enable organizations to build relationships with employees while encouraging dialogue, participation, and collaboration. Similarly, Theaker (2024) argues that internal communication is no longer a routine administrative activity but a strategic management function that strengthens employee commitment and organizational performance. These perspectives suggest that effective communication is fundamental to creating a productive and harmonious workplace.

Within the field of public relations, internal communication has shifted from the traditional one-way dissemination of information to a more interactive and employee-centred approach. Contemporary organizations recognize that employees should not merely receive information but should also have opportunities to express their opinions, provide feedback, and participate in organizational decision-making. This two-way communication approach promotes transparency, strengthens trust, and encourages employees to

feel that they are valued members of the organization. Such communication practices are consistent with the principles of Relationship Management Theory, which emphasizes dialogue and mutual understanding as the basis for building long-term organizational relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Public relations practitioners perform several important roles in managing internal communication. They develop communication strategies that ensure employees are informed about organizational goals, policies, achievements, and changes. They also manage internal communication channels such as staff meetings, newsletters, electronic mail, intranet platforms, employee handbooks, notice boards, social media platforms, webinars, and digital collaboration tools. These channels provide employees with opportunities to receive information, ask questions, share concerns, and contribute ideas that may improve organizational performance. Effective management of these communication channels helps reduce uncertainty, minimize workplace rumours, and improve employee confidence in management.

Research consistently demonstrates that organizations with effective internal communication systems experience stronger employee engagement, higher job satisfaction, improved organizational commitment, and healthier employee–management relationships. Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) found that symmetrical internal communication significantly enhances employee engagement because employees feel respected and involved in organizational activities. Similarly, Verčič and Men (2023) reported that organizations that encourage transparent communication experience higher levels of employee trust, organizational identification, and workplace cooperation. These findings reinforce the view that communication is not merely an exchange of information but a strategic process that influences employees' attitudes and behaviours.

The growing use of digital communication technologies has further transformed internal communication within organizations. Many organizations now rely on digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Slack, and organizational intranets to communicate with employees, particularly in hybrid and remote work environments. These technologies have improved the speed and accessibility of communication while creating new opportunities for employee

engagement and collaboration. However, they have also increased employees' expectations for timely responses, transparency, and continuous interaction with management. Consequently, public relations practitioners must continuously adapt communication strategies to meet the changing needs of the modern workforce.

In Nigeria, effective internal communication remains a significant challenge for many organizations, particularly within the public sector. Communication in some organizations is still largely hierarchical, with decisions communicated from management to employees without adequate opportunities for feedback or participation. This communication pattern often creates misunderstandings, reduces employee morale, weakens trust in management, and contributes to workplace conflicts. Studies conducted in Nigeria have shown that organizations with effective internal communication systems experience better employee relations, improved staff performance, and greater organizational commitment than organizations where communication is poor or inconsistent (Maiwada & Oshionebo, 2024). These findings suggest that strengthening internal communication should be a strategic priority for organizations seeking to improve employee relations and organizational performance.

Beyond facilitating the exchange of information, internal communication also serves as an important tool for managing organizational change. Employees are generally more willing to support organizational changes when they understand the reasons behind such changes and have opportunities to express their concerns. Public relations practitioners therefore play a vital role in communicating change initiatives, addressing employee anxieties, and maintaining confidence during periods of organizational transformation. Effective communication during organizational change minimizes resistance, strengthens employee commitment, and contributes to successful implementation of organizational policies and programmes.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that internal communication provides the foundation upon which effective employee relations are built. Through transparent communication, employee participation, and continuous dialogue, public relations strengthens the relationship between management and employees while promoting trust, cooperation, and organizational commitment.

However, communication alone is insufficient if employees do not have confidence in the sincerity and integrity of management. This makes employee trust another important dimension of positive employee relations and the focus of the next section.

Public Relations and Employee Trust

Employee trust is one of the most valuable outcomes of effective public relations because it forms the foundation upon which positive employee relations are built. In every organization, employees are expected to work collaboratively with management to achieve organizational goals. However, this can only be achieved when employees have confidence in the integrity, competence, and fairness of organizational leaders. Trust encourages cooperation, promotes openness, reduces workplace conflicts, and creates an environment where employees are willing to support organizational decisions. Without trust, even the most carefully designed communication strategies may fail to achieve their intended objectives because employees may question the credibility and sincerity of management.

The concept of employee trust has received considerable attention in organizational and communication literature due to its influence on employee attitudes and behaviour. Employee trust refers to the belief that management will act honestly, fairly, and consistently while considering the interests and welfare of employees. According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), trust develops when employees perceive their leaders as competent, dependable, and committed to acting in the best interest of the organization and its members. Similarly, Verčič (2021) argues that employee trust is strengthened through transparent communication, ethical leadership, and continuous engagement between management and employees. These perspectives suggest that trust is not built through promises alone but through consistent organizational actions that demonstrate credibility and accountability.

Public relations contribute significantly to the development of employee trust by creating communication processes that promote openness, honesty, and mutual understanding. Through regular communication, management is able to explain organizational decisions, clarify policies, address employee concerns, and reduce uncertainty in the workplace.

Public relations practitioners therefore serve as communication facilitators who ensure that employees receive accurate and timely information while providing management with feedback on employees' expectations and concerns. This two-way communication process strengthens confidence in management and reinforces employees' belief that their opinions are valued.

Transparency is one of the most important principles through which public relations builds trust. Employees are more likely to trust an organization when information is communicated honestly, even during periods of organizational uncertainty or crisis. Concealing important information or communicating inconsistently often creates rumours, suspicion, and dissatisfaction among employees. Conversely, organizations that communicate openly about challenges, achievements, and future plans encourage employees to develop confidence in management and remain committed to organizational goals. Kim and Lim (2024) observed that transparent internal communication significantly improves employee–organization relationships because it reduces uncertainty and strengthens employees' confidence in organizational leadership.

Trust also grows when employees are given opportunities to participate in organizational activities and decision-making. Participation creates a sense of ownership and demonstrates that management values employees' ideas and contributions. Public relations practitioners facilitate this process through employee forums, town hall meetings, suggestion schemes, surveys, and digital communication platforms that encourage dialogue rather than one-way communication. Employees who feel listened to are generally more satisfied with management and are more willing to support organizational decisions, even during periods of change.

Several empirical studies have confirmed the relationship between public relations, communication, and employee trust. Verčič and Men (2023) found that organizations with effective internal communication systems recorded higher levels of employee trust, engagement, and organizational commitment. Similarly, Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) reported that symmetrical communication enhances trust because employees perceive management as more transparent and responsive. These studies demonstrate that trust is a direct outcome of

communication practices that encourage dialogue, fairness, and mutual respect.

Within the Nigerian context, employee trust remains a major concern for many organizations. In both public and private institutions, employees often express concerns regarding inadequate communication, lack of transparency in decision-making, inconsistent implementation of organizational policies, delayed promotions, and perceived unfair treatment. These challenges have, in many cases, weakened employees' confidence in management and contributed to industrial disputes, low morale, and reduced productivity. Sambe (2008) observed that organizations that encourage open communication and employee participation are more likely to establish trust and maintain harmonious relationships between management and employees. Similarly, Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024) reported that effective internal communication positively influences employee trust, cooperation, and organizational performance in Nigerian organizations.

Trust becomes even more important during periods of organizational change, economic uncertainty, or crisis. Employees naturally seek reassurance from management during such periods, and the quality of communication often determines whether they remain committed or become resistant to change. Public relations practitioners therefore play a strategic role in managing organizational communication during difficult times by ensuring that employees receive clear, consistent, and truthful information. This approach minimizes misinformation, strengthens confidence in leadership, and promotes organizational stability.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that employee trust is both a product and an outcome of effective public relations. Organizations that invest in transparent communication, ethical leadership, employee participation, and continuous dialogue are more likely to build trust, strengthen employee-management relationships, and improve organizational performance. However, trust alone does not guarantee organizational success unless employees are actively involved and committed to organizational activities. This highlights the importance of employee engagement, which is discussed in the next section.

Public Relations and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has become one of the most important indicators of organizational effectiveness because it reflects the extent to which employees are emotionally, mentally, and physically committed to their work and the organization. In today's competitive business environment, organizations require employees who are not only competent but also motivated, committed, and willing to contribute beyond their assigned responsibilities. Consequently, employee engagement has emerged as a strategic priority for organizations seeking to improve productivity, innovation, service delivery, and long-term sustainability. Public relations contribute significantly to this objective by creating communication systems that encourage participation, trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among employees.

The concept of employee engagement has evolved considerably over the years. Kahn (1990), who introduced the concept, described employee engagement as the extent to which employees express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their work roles. Building on this perspective, Saks (2006) argued that engaged employees are more enthusiastic, dedicated, and committed because they perceive that their organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being. More recently, Men et al. (2023) observed that employee engagement is strengthened when organizations adopt inclusive communication practices that encourage dialogue, recognition, and active employee participation. These perspectives suggest that employee engagement goes beyond job performance; it reflects employees' emotional attachment to the organization and their willingness to contribute to its success.

Public relations play a strategic role in promoting employee engagement through effective internal communication and relationship management. Communication enables employees to understand organizational goals, appreciate their individual roles, and recognize how their contributions support the overall success of the organization. Employees who receive regular updates, constructive feedback, and opportunities to express their opinions are more likely to feel valued and motivated. Public relations practitioners therefore create communication platforms that encourage dialogue between management and

employees, thereby fostering mutual understanding and stronger organizational relationships.

An important strategy through which public relations enhances employee engagement is employee participation. Employees are more committed when they are involved in decision-making processes and when their opinions are considered in matters affecting their work. Participation creates a sense of ownership and responsibility, making employees feel that they are important stakeholders rather than passive recipients of management decisions. Through town hall meetings, staff forums, surveys, suggestion schemes, digital communication platforms, and employee recognition programmes, public relations practitioners provide opportunities for employees to contribute ideas, share concerns, and participate in organizational development. Such initiatives strengthen employees' emotional connection to the organization and encourage greater commitment to organizational objectives.

Recognition and appreciation also play an important role in employee engagement. Employees who receive recognition for their contributions are more likely to remain motivated and committed to organizational success. Public relations supports this process by promoting a culture of appreciation through employee award programmes, internal publications, newsletters, social media recognition, and other communication initiatives that celebrate employee achievements. These efforts reinforce positive behaviour, improve morale, and strengthen employees' sense of belonging within the organization. Empirical evidence supports the relationship between public relations and employee engagement. Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) found that symmetrical internal communication significantly improves employee engagement because employees perceive management as transparent, supportive, and responsive to their needs. Similarly, Men et al. (2023) reported that organizations that promote inclusive communication and employee involvement experience higher levels of engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Verčič and Men (2023) also observed that employees are more engaged when communication is open, consistent, and characterized by mutual respect. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that communication is a critical driver of employee engagement and organizational success.

Within the Nigerian context, employee engagement remains a challenge in many organizations due to inadequate communication, limited employee involvement in decision-making, poor recognition systems, and weak leadership practices. In many public institutions and private organizations, communication often flows from management to employees with little opportunity for feedback or participation. This one-way communication pattern reduces employees' sense of belonging and weakens their commitment to organizational goals. Studies by Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024) revealed that organizations that encourage effective internal communication and employee participation record higher levels of staff motivation, cooperation, and organizational performance. Similarly, Sambe (2009) emphasized that employee engagement can only be sustained when communication promotes dialogue, trust, and mutual understanding between management and employees.

The increasing adoption of digital communication technologies has also transformed employee engagement in contemporary organizations. Virtual meetings, enterprise social networks, collaborative platforms, and mobile communication applications have created new opportunities for employees to interact with management irrespective of geographical location. While these technologies have improved communication efficiency, they also require organizations to adopt more responsive, inclusive, and employee-centred communication strategies. Public relations practitioners therefore play a crucial role in ensuring that digital communication enhances employee participation without diminishing interpersonal relationships and organizational culture.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that employee engagement is largely influenced by the quality of communication between management and employees. Through strategic internal communication, employee participation, recognition, and relationship management, public relations creates an environment where employees are motivated to contribute meaningfully to organizational success. However, sustained employee engagement ultimately strengthens employees' emotional attachment to the organization, resulting in higher levels of organizational commitment. This relationship forms the basis of the next section, which examines public relations, organizational commitment, and positive employee relations.

Public Relations, Organizational Commitment and Positive Employee Relations

Organizational commitment is widely recognized as one of the strongest indicators of positive employee relations because it reflects the degree to which employees identify with the goals, values, and vision of their organization. Employees who are committed are more likely to remain loyal to the organization, perform their duties diligently, support organizational policies, and contribute positively to organizational growth. In contrast, employees with low levels of commitment often display poor job performance, absenteeism, low morale, and a higher intention to leave the organization. For this reason, organizations increasingly regard organizational commitment as a valuable outcome of effective management and strategic communication.

The concept of organizational commitment has been extensively discussed in organizational behaviour literature. Meyer and Allen (1991) describe organizational commitment as the psychological attachment employees develop towards their organization, which influences their willingness to remain members of the organization and contribute to its success. They identified three dimensions of commitment: affective commitment, which refers to employees' emotional attachment to the organization; continuance commitment, which relates to the perceived cost of leaving the organization; and normative commitment, which reflects employees' sense of obligation to remain with the organization. Among these dimensions, affective commitment is often regarded as the strongest predictor of positive employee behaviour because employees remain with the organization out of genuine attachment rather than necessity.

Public relations contribute significantly to the development of organizational commitment through effective communication and relationship management. Employees are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment to an organization when they are adequately informed about organizational goals, involved in decision-making, recognized for their contributions, and treated with fairness and respect. Public relations practitioners facilitate these outcomes by creating communication platforms that encourage dialogue, participation, transparency, and collaboration between management and employees. Through these communication efforts, organizations strengthen employees' confidence in leadership

and reinforce their commitment to organizational objectives.

A major contribution of public relations to organizational commitment is its ability to promote a positive organizational culture. Organizational culture reflects the shared values, beliefs, and behaviours that shape how employees interact with one another and with management. Public relations helps communicate these values consistently through internal campaigns, employee orientation programmes, newsletters, leadership messages, staff meetings, and organizational events. When employees clearly understand the organization's mission and values and perceive that management genuinely supports them, they are more likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging and remain committed to the organization.

Strategic communication also plays a crucial role during periods of organizational change. Organizational restructuring, technological innovations, policy reforms, and economic challenges often create uncertainty among employees. During such periods, effective public relations helps reduce fear and resistance by providing accurate information, addressing employee concerns, and encouraging continuous dialogue. Employees who understand the reasons behind organizational changes are generally more willing to cooperate with management and remain committed to organizational goals. This demonstrates that organizational commitment is strengthened not only through favourable working conditions but also through transparent and credible communication.

Several empirical studies have established a positive relationship between strategic communication and organizational commitment. Verčič and Men (2023) found that organizations with transparent internal communication recorded higher levels of employee commitment and stronger employee–organization relationships.

Likewise, Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) reported that employees who experience symmetrical communication are more likely to identify with organizational values and demonstrate greater commitment to organizational success. Men et al. (2023) also concluded that organizations that promote inclusive communication and employee participation experience higher levels of employee engagement and organizational commitment. These findings collectively demonstrate that communication remains one of the most effective

tools for strengthening employees' attachment to their organizations.

Within the Nigerian context, organizational commitment continues to be influenced by the quality of communication between management and employees. In many organizations, poor communication, inadequate recognition of employees' contributions, limited opportunities for participation, and perceived unfair treatment have weakened employees' commitment and affected workplace relationships. These challenges have contributed to declining morale, increased labour disputes, reduced productivity, and high employee turnover in some sectors. Nigerian scholars such as Sambe (2008) argue that organizations that encourage open communication, employee participation, and mutual respect are more likely to build committed and productive workforces. Similarly, Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024) observed that effective internal communication enhances employee commitment, improves staff performance, and strengthens employee relations within Nigerian organizations.

Positive employee relations represent the cumulative outcome of effective public relations practices. They are achieved when organizations consistently communicate with employees, encourage participation, build trust, recognize employee contributions, and promote fairness in workplace relationships. Employees who experience these conditions are more likely to demonstrate commitment, cooperate with management, resolve conflicts peacefully, and work towards achieving organizational objectives. Consequently, positive employee relations should not be viewed merely as the absence of industrial conflict but as the presence of mutual trust, effective communication, collaboration, respect, and shared organizational purpose.

From the literature reviewed, it is evident that public relations serve as the communication bridge that connects management and employees. Through strategic internal communication, trust-building, employee engagement, and organizational commitment, public relations creates an environment that supports healthy and productive workplace relationships. This confirms that positive employee relations are not achieved by chance but through deliberate communication strategies that promote mutual understanding and long-term relationship building. The conceptual discussions presented in this chapter therefore

provide the foundation for examining the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the *Relationship Management Theory (RMT)* developed by Ledingham and Bruning (1998). The theory is considered appropriate because it explains how organizations establish, develop, maintain, and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders through effective communication. Unlike the traditional view of public relations, which focused mainly on publicity and media relations, Relationship Management Theory views public relations as a strategic management function whose primary purpose is to build long-term relationships based on trust, openness, mutual understanding, commitment, involvement, and satisfaction.

Relationship Management Theory emerged as a response to the changing nature of public relations practice in modern organizations. Earlier public relations models placed greater emphasis on information dissemination and image management. However, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) argued that the real value of public relations should be measured by the quality of the relationships an organization develops with its stakeholders rather than by the amount of media attention it receives. The theory therefore shifted public relations from a communication-centred approach to a relationship-centred approach, emphasizing that organizations achieve sustainable success when they establish mutually beneficial relationships with both external and internal stakeholders.

According to the theory, communication is not an end in itself but a means of creating understanding, trust, cooperation, and commitment between an organization and its stakeholders. Effective communication encourages dialogue rather than one-way information sharing. Employees are given opportunities to express their opinions, ask questions, provide feedback, and participate in organizational decision-making. This continuous interaction strengthens confidence in management and promotes a sense of belonging among employees. Consequently, organizations that adopt two-way symmetrical communication are more likely to experience harmonious employee-management relationships, higher employee engagement, and improved organizational performance.

A major assumption of Relationship Management Theory is that employees are strategic stakeholders whose interests should be considered in organizational decision-making. The theory argues that organizations cannot achieve their goals without maintaining healthy relationships with their employees because employees influence productivity, innovation, service quality, and organizational reputation. When employees feel respected, listened to, and adequately informed, they are more likely to trust management, support organizational policies, and remain committed to organizational objectives. Conversely, poor communication, lack of transparency, and exclusion from decision-making weaken employee trust and may lead to dissatisfaction, workplace conflict, and low organizational commitment.

The theory identifies several dimensions that determine the quality of organizational relationships. These include trust, openness, commitment, involvement, control mutuality, and satisfaction (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Trust reflects employees' confidence in the integrity and competence of management. Openness refers to honest and transparent communication between management and employees. Commitment describes the willingness of both parties to maintain a long-term relationship, while involvement emphasizes employee participation in organizational activities and decision-making. Control mutuality recognizes that both management and employees should have opportunities to influence organizational decisions, whereas satisfaction reflects employees' positive evaluation of their relationship with the organization. Together, these dimensions explain how effective public relations contribute to positive employee relations.

The relevance of Relationship Management Theory has increased in recent years due to rapid technological changes, workforce diversity, globalization, and the growing demand for employee-centred leadership. Modern organizations now recognize that maintaining healthy employee relations requires more than issuing instructions or communicating organizational policies. Employees expect transparent leadership, continuous feedback, recognition, fairness, and opportunities to contribute to organizational decisions. These expectations align closely with the assumptions of Relationship Management Theory, making it one

of the most influential theories in contemporary public relations scholarship (Theaker, 2024; Verčič & Men, 2023).

Within the Nigerian context, the theory provides a useful framework for understanding the communication challenges affecting many organizations. In several public and private organizations, communication often remains hierarchical, with employees receiving information without adequate opportunities for dialogue or participation. Such communication practices weaken trust, reduce employee engagement, and contribute to industrial disputes and low organizational commitment. By applying the principles of Relationship Management Theory, organizations can strengthen communication, encourage employee participation, resolve workplace conflicts, and foster healthier relationships between management and employees. This approach is particularly important in Nigeria, where organizations increasingly operate in dynamic environments that require collaboration, trust, and effective stakeholder engagement.

The theory is therefore highly relevant to this study because it explains how strategic public relations practices influence positive employee relations through effective internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of public relations in creating mutually beneficial relationships between management and employees. Since the major variables examined in this study correspond with the key assumptions of Relationship Management Theory, the theory provides an appropriate foundation for analysing how public relations contributes to positive employee relations within contemporary organizations.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the role of public relations, internal communication, and employee relations in improving organizational effectiveness. These studies provide evidence that strategic communication strengthens employee trust, engagement, commitment, and workplace relationships. Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) conducted a study titled *"Exploring the Interrelationship and Roles of Employee Organization Relationship Outcomes Between Symmetrical Internal Communication and*

Employee Job Engagement." The researchers adopted a quantitative survey design involving employees from different organizations. The findings revealed that symmetrical internal communication significantly improves employee engagement and strengthens employee–organization relationships. The study concluded that effective communication enhances employee trust and organizational commitment.

Verčič and Men (2023), in their study titled *"Redefining the Link Between Internal Communication and Employee Engagement,"* employed a quantitative survey method among organizational employees. The findings showed that strategic internal communication positively influences employee engagement, trust, and commitment. The study recommended that organizations should strengthen internal communication to improve employee relationships.

Men, Qin, Mitson, and Thelen (2023) carried out a study titled *"Engaging Employees Via an Inclusive Climate: The Role of Organizational Diversity Communication and Cultural Intelligence."* Using a survey research design, the study found that inclusive communication practices significantly improve employee engagement and organizational attachment. The researchers concluded that communication remains an important tool for promoting positive employee relations.

Kim and Lim (2024) conducted a study titled *"Mitigating Organizational Conspiracy Beliefs Through Strategic Internal Communication and Employee–Organization Relationships in the Workplace."* Using a quantitative research design, the study found that strategic internal communication improves trust, strengthens employee–organization relationships, and enhances organizational commitment. In Nigeria, Sambe (2009) conducted a study titled *"Achieving Effective Employee Relations: The Public Relations Perspective."* The study adopted a qualitative approach through documentary analysis of public relations practices. The findings revealed that two-way communication, employee participation, and mutual understanding are essential for achieving effective employee relations. The study concluded that public relations are indispensable in maintaining harmonious relationships between management and employees.

Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024) conducted a study titled *"Exploring the Potential of Internal*

Communication and Employee Relations for Effective Staff Performance in Nigeria Customs Service." The study employed qualitative secondary data analysis. The findings revealed that strategic internal communication improves employee participation, job satisfaction, and employee relations, which ultimately enhance staff performance.

Maiwada (2024) also conducted a study titled *"Exploring Internal Communication and Employee Relations Management for Effective Staff Performance in Nigeria Customs Service."* The study adopted a quantitative survey design involving 342 personnel of the Nigeria Customs Service. The findings indicated that effective top-down communication significantly influences employee attitudes, motivation, and performance. The study concluded that internal communication and employee relations management are fundamental to organizational effectiveness.

Okunade, J. K. (2025) carried out a study titled *"Exploring the Impact of Effective Internal Communication Strategies on Employee, Productivity, and Organizational Culture."* The study employed qualitative interviews among academic and non-academic staff of a private university in Lagos State. The findings showed that transparent and inclusive communication enhances employee morale, engagement, and organizational culture, although communication gaps still exist in many institutions. Selem (2025) conducted a study titled *"Comparative Analysis of Public Relations Roles, Practitioners' Functions and Communication Models in Public and Private Organizations in Nigeria."* Using a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews involving public relations practitioners, the study found that organizations that adopted two-way communication models maintained stronger relationships with employees and other stakeholders than organizations relying mainly on one-way communication.

Maiwada (2025) conducted a PhD study titled *"Assessment of Internal Communication and Employee Relations Management in the Nigeria Customs Service."* The study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that effective internal communication significantly improves employee relations, organizational trust, and operational effectiveness within the Nigeria Customs Service. The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that public relations,

particularly through strategic internal communication, play a significant role in fostering positive employee relations. They consistently show that effective communication enhances employee trust, engagement, commitment, satisfaction, and organizational performance. Nevertheless, most previous studies examined individual dimensions such as internal communication or employee engagement, with limited attention given to the broader role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations. This gap justifies the need for the present study.

Research Gap

Existing literature has established that public relations play a significant role in strengthening organizational communication and improving workplace relationships. Previous studies have extensively examined individual variables such as internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. For example, studies by Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021), Verčič and Men (2023), and Men et al. (2023) demonstrated that effective internal communication positively influences employee engagement, trust, and organizational commitment. Similarly, Nigerian studies by Sambe (2008), Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024), and Nguru and Ibrahim (2018) emphasized the importance of communication in improving organizational performance and employee cooperation. Although these studies have contributed significantly to the literature, they primarily examined these variables independently rather than explaining how they collectively contribute to fostering positive employee relations.

Another noticeable gap relates to research methodology. A substantial proportion of previous studies adopted quantitative approaches, relying mainly on surveys and statistical analyses to examine the relationship between public relations and employee-related outcomes. While these studies provide useful empirical evidence, they often offer limited explanations of the underlying processes through which public relations practices influence employee relations. There is therefore a need for more qualitative evidence that synthesizes existing knowledge and provides a broader understanding of how strategic public relations contribute to positive relationships between management and employees.

Furthermore, most international studies were conducted in developed economies where

organizational structures, communication systems, leadership practices, and workplace cultures differ considerably from those in developing countries such as Nigeria. Although a number of Nigerian studies have examined internal communication and organizational performance, relatively few have comprehensively explored public relations as a strategic management function for fostering positive employee relations. Consequently, there remains limited literature that integrates internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment within a single analytical framework, particularly from the Nigerian perspective.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by adopting a qualitative secondary data analysis through thematic literature synthesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations. Unlike many previous studies that focused on isolated variables or employed predominantly quantitative methods, this study integrates the major dimensions of public relations; internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment to explain how they collectively contribute to healthy employee management relationships. In doing so, the study contributes to public relations scholarship by offering a more holistic understanding of employee relations while providing insights that are relevant to organizations, communication professionals, and researchers, particularly within the Nigerian context.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design employing qualitative secondary data analysis to examine the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations. The design was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of organizational communication practices through the interpretation and synthesis of existing scholarly literature rather than the collection of primary data. Qualitative research provides opportunities for exploring concepts, patterns, and relationships across different organizational contexts, making it particularly suitable for investigating issues relating to public relations, employee engagement, trust-building, and workplace relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study relied exclusively on secondary sources of data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books,

conference proceedings, institutional reports, and other credible academic publications. Relevant literature was retrieved from reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, Sage Journals, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and ResearchGate. Particular emphasis was placed on recent studies published between 2020 and 2025, while seminal works were incorporated to provide theoretical and conceptual foundations. The selected literature was critically reviewed to examine how public relations practices such as internal communication, employee participation, trust-building, and employee engagement contribute to the development of positive employee relations across organizations. Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-stage framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves familiarization with the literature, coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation of findings. The analysis revealed four major themes—internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment—which guided the discussion of the study's findings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, only credible and peer-reviewed academic sources were included, and findings from multiple sources were systematically compared to enhance consistency, dependability, and confirmability. The inclusion of both international and Nigerian studies further strengthened the validity and comprehensiveness of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations

This study did not involve human participants; therefore, ethical issues relating to informed consent and confidentiality did not arise. Nevertheless, ethical principles guiding academic research were strictly observed. All ideas, findings, and opinions obtained from published sources were appropriately acknowledged through accurate in-text citations and references in accordance with the *American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition* referencing style. Care was also taken to avoid plagiarism, misrepresentation of authors' views, and selective reporting of evidence.

Findings from Literature Synthesis

The review of relevant literature revealed that public relations play a fundamental role in fostering positive employee relations through strategic

communication and relationship management. The findings were synthesized based on the four objectives of the study, namely: internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment.

Theme One: Public Relations and Internal Communication

The reviewed literature consistently showed that internal communication is the foundation of positive employee relations. Scholars such as Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021), Verčič and Men (2023), and Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024) observed that organizations with effective internal communication systems experience stronger relationships between management and employees. The literature further revealed that transparent and timely communication enables employees to understand organizational goals, policies, and expectations while reducing uncertainty and workplace conflict.

The review also indicated that two-way communication is more effective than one-way communication because it encourages employee participation and feedback. Organizations that create opportunities for dialogue through staff meetings, digital communication platforms, employee forums, newsletters, and feedback mechanisms are more likely to promote cooperation, mutual understanding, and trust. In the Nigerian context, several studies reported that ineffective communication remains one of the major causes of industrial disputes, low employee morale, and declining organizational performance. Consequently, strategic internal communication was identified as one of the most important public relations practices for strengthening employee relations.

Theme Two: Public Relations and Employee Trust

Another major finding from the literature is that employee trust develops through transparent, honest, and consistent communication. The reviewed studies demonstrated that employees are more willing to support organizational decisions when management communicates openly and responds sincerely to employee concerns. Kim and Lim (2024) as well as Verčič (2021) found that strategic internal communication significantly improves employee trust because it reduces uncertainty and enhances employees' confidence in organizational leadership.

The literature further showed that trust is strengthened when employees perceive fairness in organizational policies and are given opportunities to participate in decision-making. Nigerian studies similarly revealed that organizations characterized by open communication experience stronger employee confidence, reduced workplace conflict, and healthier relationships between management and employees. Overall, the reviewed literature identified trust as one of the strongest outcomes of effective public relations practice.

Theme Three: Public Relations and Employee Engagement

The findings also revealed that public relations contribute significantly to employee engagement by creating communication systems that encourage participation, recognition, and collaboration. The reviewed literature showed that employees become more committed to their work when they are adequately informed, recognized for their contributions, and involved in organizational activities. Men et al. (2023) and Verčič and Men (2023) reported that organizations promoting inclusive communication record higher levels of employee engagement and job satisfaction.

The literature equally indicated that engaged employees are more productive, innovative, and willing to support organizational objectives. Nigerian studies reviewed also suggested that organizations that encourage employee participation through effective communication enjoy improved staff morale, stronger teamwork, and better organizational performance. These findings suggest that employee engagement is a direct outcome of strategic public relations practices.

Theme Four: Public Relations and Organizational Commitment

The review further established that effective public relations strengthens organizational commitment by promoting trust, communication, employee involvement, and a positive organizational culture. Employees who experience transparent communication and supportive leadership are more likely to develop emotional attachment to their organizations and remain committed to organizational goals. Meyer and Allen's (1991) concept of organizational commitment was consistently supported by recent studies reviewed in this study. The literature also revealed that organizations with high levels of employee commitment experience lower staff turnover, fewer

industrial disputes, improved productivity, and stronger organizational performance. Within the Nigerian context, studies emphasized that organizations that invest in strategic communication and relationship management are better positioned to build committed workforces capable of achieving long-term organizational success. Overall, the literature demonstrates that public relations is not merely a communication function but a strategic management tool that promotes trust, employee engagement, organizational commitment, and ultimately positive employee relations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that public relations plays a strategic role in fostering positive employee relations through effective internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. The reviewed literature consistently showed that organizations that prioritize transparent communication and relationship management create healthier working environments where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to organizational success. These findings reinforce the view that public relations has evolved beyond image management to become an essential management function that strengthens relationships between organizations and their employees.

The first finding revealed that effective internal communication serves as the foundation for positive employee relations. The literature showed that employees who receive accurate, timely, and transparent information are more likely to understand organizational objectives, participate actively in organizational activities, and cooperate with management. This finding agrees with the studies of Kim, Ruck, and Welch (2021) and Verčič and Men (2023), who found that symmetrical internal communication significantly improves employee–organization relationships. The finding also supports Nigerian studies, particularly Maiwada and Oshionebo (2024), which reported that organizations with effective internal communication experience higher employee satisfaction and improved organizational performance. This finding aligns with the assumptions of *Relationship Management Theory*, which emphasizes two-way communication, dialogue, and mutual understanding as the foundation for building sustainable organizational relationships.

The second finding established that employee trust is a major outcome of strategic public relations practices. The reviewed literature indicated that employees develop confidence in management when communication is transparent, consistent, and honest. Employees are also more willing to support organizational decisions when they perceive fairness and openness in management practices. This finding is consistent with Kim and Lim (2024), who reported that transparent communication strengthens employee trust and improves employee–organization relationships. Similarly, Verčič (2021) observed that trust develops when organizations communicate openly and respond genuinely to employees' concerns. In Nigeria, poor communication and inadequate employee involvement have been identified as major factors contributing to industrial disputes and declining employee confidence in management. The findings therefore suggest that organizations seeking to improve employee relations should prioritize trust-building through strategic communication.

The third finding showed that public relations significantly enhance employee engagement by encouraging participation, recognition, and collaboration. The reviewed studies revealed that employees become more committed to organizational goals when they are involved in decision-making and when their contributions are acknowledged. These findings support the work of Men et al. (2023), who found that inclusive communication promotes higher employee engagement and job satisfaction. Similarly, Verčič and Men (2023) reported that organizations that encourage dialogue and employee participation achieve stronger workforce commitment. Nigerian literature also indicates that employee engagement improves when communication promotes transparency and mutual respect. This finding further supports the argument of Relationship Management Theory that healthy organizational relationships are sustained through continuous interaction and employee involvement rather than one-way communication.

The fourth finding revealed that organizational commitment is strengthened when employees experience effective communication, trust, participation, and supportive leadership. Employees who feel respected and valued are more likely to identify with organizational values and remain committed to achieving organizational objectives. This finding agrees with Meyer and Allen's (1991) theory of organizational commitment

and is further supported by recent studies demonstrating that organizations with effective internal communication experience stronger employee loyalty and lower turnover intentions. Within the Nigerian context, organizations that invest in employee-centred communication and relationship-building initiatives are more likely to maintain harmonious workplace relationships and improve organizational performance.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that positive employee relations are not achieved through isolated communication activities but through a coordinated public relations strategy that integrates transparent communication, trust-building, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. These elements are interrelated and reinforce one another in creating a healthy organizational climate. The findings therefore validate the assumptions of Relationship Management Theory, which maintains that organizations achieve sustainable success by developing mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders, particularly employees.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of public relations literature by demonstrating that strategic public relations should be regarded as an essential organizational function for improving employee relations rather than merely a tool for managing corporate reputation. Particularly within the Nigerian context, where many organizations continue to face challenges associated with ineffective communication and declining employee trust, the findings highlight the importance of adopting employee-centred communication strategies that promote dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect. Such an approach will not only strengthen employee relations but also improve organizational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations through a qualitative secondary data analysis of existing literature. The review established that public relations have evolved from its traditional role of managing organizational image to a strategic management function that strengthens relationships between organizations and their employees. The findings demonstrated that effective public relations promotes transparent internal communication, builds employee trust, enhances employee engagement, and strengthens

organizational commitment, all of which contribute significantly to positive employee relations.

The study further revealed that organizations that invest in strategic internal communication create work environments where employees feel informed, respected, and actively involved in organizational activities. Such organizations are better able to build trust, reduce workplace conflicts, improve employee morale, and encourage collaboration between management and employees. Conversely, organizations that neglect internal communication often experience employee dissatisfaction, low commitment, industrial disputes, and reduced organizational performance.

Within the Nigerian context, the study found that many organizations continue to face challenges associated with poor communication, inadequate employee participation, weak trust in management, and declining organizational commitment. These challenges underscore the need for organizations to move beyond viewing public relations as a tool for external publicity and instead recognize it as a strategic function for managing internal stakeholders. By adopting employee-centred communication strategies that encourage openness, dialogue, fairness, and participation, organizations can strengthen workplace relationships and improve organizational effectiveness.

In conclusion, positive employee relations are not achieved by chance but through deliberate and consistent public relations practices that promote mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation. The study therefore concludes that strategic public relations are indispensable to building healthy employee–management relationships and achieving sustainable organizational success. Organizations that prioritize relationship management are more likely to develop committed employees, maintain industrial harmony, and enhance long-term organizational performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Organizations should strengthen their internal communication systems by ensuring that information is shared promptly, accurately, and transparently. Employees should be given regular updates on organizational policies, goals, and changes to improve trust and reduce misinformation.

- Management should encourage two way communication and employee participation by creating opportunities for employees to express their opinions, provide feedback, and contribute to organizational decision-making. This will strengthen trust, improve engagement, and foster positive employee relations.
- Public relations practitioners should be actively involved in employee relationship management rather than concentrating mainly on external communication. Organizations should recognize public relations as a strategic management function responsible for building strong relationships with internal stakeholders.
- Organizations should implement employee engagement and recognition programmes that acknowledge employees' contributions and encourage teamwork, collaboration, and commitment. Such initiatives will improve job satisfaction, organizational loyalty, and overall workplace productivity.
- Nigerian organizations should invest in continuous communication training for managers, supervisors, and public relations professionals to improve interpersonal communication, conflict management, and relationship-building skills. This will contribute to healthier workplace relationships and sustainable organizational growth.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive qualitative synthesis of the role of public relations in fostering positive employee relations. Unlike many previous studies that examined internal communication, employee trust, employee engagement, and organizational commitment separately, this study integrates these concepts into a single analytical framework to explain how they collectively contribute to healthy employee–management relationships.

The study also contributes methodologically by demonstrating the usefulness of qualitative secondary data analysis and thematic analysis in examining public relations issues. Furthermore, by incorporating both international and Nigerian literature, the study provides a broader understanding of employee relations within the Nigerian organizational environment.

The findings offer practical insights for public relations practitioners, organizational leaders, human resource managers, and researchers seeking to strengthen employee relations through strategic communication and relationship management.

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