



Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation Beyond Media Mentions: Insights from the Nigerian Context

ASUQUO, Raymond Udosen

Research Fellow, Department of Mass Communication, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

Article DOI: 10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-0904

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2025-3050-0904>

KEYWORDS: Public Relations, Evaluation, Media Mentions, Nigeria, Excellence Theory, Barcelona Principles

ABSTRACT: Public Relations (public relations (PR)) is increasingly recognized as a strategic communication function that strengthens organizational legitimacy, nurtures trust, and manages reputation in complex social and political environments. In Nigeria, yet it must be acknowledged, public relations (PR) measurement has traditionally relied on narrow indicators such as press clippings, media mentions, and publicity reports. These media-centric methods privilege visibility over effectiveness and fall short of adequately to capture public relations (PR)'s broader contributions to stakeholder relationships, behavioral outcomes, and societal impact. Anchored on Excellence Theory, which frames public relations (PR) as a strategic management function, and the Barcelona Principles of Communication Measurement and Evaluation, which emphasize outcome-oriented, transparent, and multidimensional systematic assessment, this conceptual paper interrogates the limitations of traditional systematic assessment conceptual approaches when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context. Drawing on both global scholarship and Nigerian literature, it examines the cultural, institutional, and political factors that have shaped local practices and hindered methodological innovation. The study proposes a holistic conceptual approach that integrates international best practices with Nigeria's contextual realities, encouraging practitioners to embrace methods that combine qualitative and quantitative metrics. It recommends three key steps: abandoning outdated metrics such as Advertising Value Equivalence (AVE); adopting the Barcelona Principles to align communication with organizational and societal goals; and fostering collaboration between academia, practitioners, and professional associations to develop locally relevant standards. By advancing this multidimensional and context-sensitive perspective, the paper contributes to theory-building in public relations (PR) and offers practical insights for redefining systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context. Ultimately, it contends that rigorous and credible systematic assessment practices are essential for enhancing the profession's accountability, relevance, and long-term impact.

Corresponding Author:

ASUQUO, Raymond Udosen

Published: September 18, 2025

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

1. INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (public relations (PR)) as a professional and academic field has evolved from being narrowly perceived as a publicity function to being recognized as a strategic management tool that contributes to organizational reputation, legitimacy, and long-term survival (Grunig, 2006; Macnamara, 2018). At its core, public relations (PR) seeks to create mutual understanding and foster productive relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. However, for the discipline to command credibility and relevance within organizations and in society, the question of measurement and systematic assessment remains central. Without clear evidence of impact, public relations (PR) risks being dismissed as a cost center rather than a driver of value (Watson & Noble, 2014).

It is worth noting that In Nigeria, as in many developing societies, the dominant conceptual approach to public relations (PR) systematic assessment continues to rely on media mentions, press clippings, and advertising value equivalency (AVE). Practitioners and organizations often equate high visibility in newspapers, radio, television, and blogs with communication effectiveness (Nwosu, 2017). This conceptual approach is partly rooted when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context's media-driven culture where public exposure is perceived as a marker of influence and legitimacy (Oso & Pate, 2011). Politicians, corporations, and public institutions frequently showcase the volume of press coverage they receive as evidence of successful communication campaigns.

While visibility is particularly significant, such reliance on media-centric metrics presents several shortcomings. First, it prioritizes outputs (such as the number of articles published) over outcomes (such as changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior). Second, it overlooks the issue of sentiment whether coverage is positive, negative, or neutral. Third, it fall short of adequatels to capture stakeholder engagement and trust, which are critical to public relations (PR)'s long-term effectiveness (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Finally, in a country as linguistically and culturally diverse as Nigeria, media mentions in English-based outlets may not adequately reflect communication resonance with grassroots audiences, particularly in rural communities.

Globally, the discourse on public relations (PR) measurement has shifted towards holistic systematic assessment conceptual approaches that emphasize organizational outcomes, relationship quality, and societal impact. Initiatives such as the Barcelona Principles (AMEC, 2020) and the AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework have provided practitioners with models for linking communication activities to measurable results. Similarly, the Excellence Theory positions public relations (PR) as most effective when it contributes strategically to organizational decision-making and legitimacy (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 2006). These developments highlight the inadequacy of media mentions as the sole metric of success.

Nigeria offers a unique and compelling context for exploring this issue. The country has one of Africa's largest media markets, with an estimated 100 million internet users, active social media engagement, and a complex socio-political environment where communication plays a central role in shaping public perception (Ekanem, 2019). From political campaigns to corporate social responsibility initiatives and public health communication, public relations (PR) is widely practiced. Yet, the absence of comprehensive measurement conceptual approaches undermines the profession's ability to demonstrate strategic value.

Importantly, this paper contends that for public relations (PR) to attain full recognition as a management function when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context, measurement and systematic assessment must move beyond media mentions. Anchored on the Excellence Theory and the Barcelona Principles, this conceptual paper reviews existing scholarship, critiques the dominance of media-focused systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context, and proposes a multidimensional conceptual approach that reflects local realities although it should be noted that aligning with global best practices. By doing so, it contributes to both theory-building in public relations (PR) and the practical advancement of professional standards when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory, originally developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and further refined by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002), conceptualizes public relations (PR) (public relations (PR)) as a strategic management function that generates value through two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This theory emphasizes that public relations (PR) is most effective when it goes beyond one-way information dissemination to foster mutual understanding, dialogue, and long-term relational equity between organizations and their stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). By focusing on reciprocal communication, the theory highlights the ethical and strategic dimensions of public relations (PR), positioning it as an essential component of organizational governance, reputation management, and societal engagement (Macnamara, 2014; Watson, 2012).

It is worth noting that in practice, the Excellence Theory challenges traditional, output-focused systematic assessment methods by advocating for relationship-oriented and outcome-driven metrics (Grunig, 2006; Macnamara, 2018). Within the Nigerian context, where public relations (PR) practice has historically been dominated by media clippings, publicity counts, and short-term visibility measures (Ekanem, 2019; Nwosu, 2017), applying the Excellence Theory entails a paradigm shift. Evaluating conceptual approaches should prioritize indicators that capture trust, stakeholder satisfaction, loyalty, and confidence, as well as the organization's capacity to respond to societal needs and policy environments (Okafor, 2019; Olaleye, 2021). Moreover, the theory underscores the importance of organizational culture, ethical standards, and participatory engagement in determining communication effectiveness, all of which are critical when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context's diverse socio-political landscape (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

By integrating Excellence Theory into public relations (PR) systematic assessment, Nigerian practitioners and scholars can move toward more sophisticated, context-sensitive systematic assessments that recognize the strategic and relational contributions of public relations (PR). This conceptual approach not only strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of the profession but also reinforces the role of communication as a driver of organizational performance, stakeholder alignment, and broader social impact (Watson & Noble, 2014; Zeffass, Verčič, & Volk, 2021).

2.2 The Barcelona Principles

The Barcelona Principles of Communication Measurement and Evaluation were first adopted in 2010 by the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) and later updated in 2015 and 2020 to reflect evolving practices in global communication (AMEC, 2020; Macnamara, 2014). These principles emerged as a response to long-standing challenges in public relations (PR) measurement, especially the overreliance on simplistic media metrics.

At their core, the Barcelona Principles emphasize that communication effectiveness should not be reduced to media coverage counts or column inches. Instead, they advocate for outcome-oriented, transparent, and inclusive conceptual approaches to systematic assessment. Specifically, the updated Barcelona Principles 3.0 (2020) highlight seven key commitments (AMEC, 2020; Watson, 2012):

Setting goals is an absolute prerequisite to communication planning, measurement, and systematic assessment. Measurement and systematic assessment should identify outputs, outcomes, and potential impacts. Outcomes and impact should be identified for both communication and business performance. Communication measurement and systematic assessment should include both qualitative and quantitative methods. AVEs (Advertising Value Equivalents) are not the value of communication. Holistic communication measurement and systematic assessment includes all relevant online and offline channels. Communication measurement and systematic assessment are rooted in integrity, transparency, and ethical practices.

The rejection of AVE is one of the most particularly significant contributions of the Barcelona Principles. AVE, or Advertising Value Equivalence, is the outdated practice of assigning a monetary value to earned media coverage by comparing it to the cost of purchasing an equivalent amount of advertising space (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). While once popular, AVE is now widely criticized for being unscientific, misleading, and incapable of demonstrating the real impact of communication on attitudes, behaviors, and societal change (Watson, 2013).

By integrating the Barcelona Principles, Nigerian public relations (PR) practitioners and scholars can move beyond surface-level indicators such as media mentions or publicity value. Instead, they can adopt multi-dimensional conceptual approach that link communication activities to organizational objectives, policy influence, community trust, and measurable social impact (Okafor, 2019). For instance, in contexts such as public health campaigns, democratic governance, or corporate social responsibility initiatives, the Barcelona Principles encourage systematic assessment methods that capture changes in awareness, attitudes, participation, and institutional legitimacy (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

Taken together, Excellence Theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and the Barcelona Principles provide a dual conceptual approach for rethinking public relations (PR) systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context. Excellence Theory grounds the practice in theoretical rigor, stressing two-way communication, ethics, and societal accountability, although it should be noted that the Barcelona Principles offer practical measurement standards that can guide practitioners away from vanity metrics and toward demonstrable value creation. This integrated perspective is essential for strengthening both the credibility of the profession and its contribution to national development (Olaleye, 2021).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Global Perspectives

Globally, the field of public relations (PR) systematic assessment has undergone a significant transformation, moving beyond traditional media monitoring and output-focused metrics toward comprehensive conceptual approach that emphasize behavioral, relational, and organizational outcomes (Watson & Noble, 2014). Scholars have increasingly highlighted the limitations of relying solely on visibility metrics, arguing for systematic assessment conceptual approaches that assess the actual impact of communication on stakeholder attitudes, understanding, and decision-making. Macnamara (2018) underscores the importance of differentiating between outtakes, which reflect audience comprehension and message retention, and outcomes, which capture meaningful behavioral or organizational change resulting from communication initiatives.

Moreover, Zerfass, Verčič, and Volk (2021) observe the growing adoption of integrated systematic assessment models, such as the AMEC conceptual approach, across Europe and North America, which combine qualitative and quantitative measures to provide a holistic systematic assessment of communication effectiveness. These models prioritize the alignment of public relations (PR) activities with organizational goals, encourage ethical transparency, and recognize the value of stakeholder engagement and societal impact. In addition, global trends reflect a push toward evidence-based practice, where public relations (PR) measurement not only justifies investment but also informs strategic decision-making and enhances organizational learning (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

Collectively, these global perspectives illustrate an evolution in public relations (PR) systematic assessment from superficial metrics to strategically grounded, multidimensional conceptual approaches, offering lessons and standards that can be adapted to diverse contexts, including emerging markets such as Nigeria, where similar shifts in measurement paradigms are increasingly necessary.

3.2 Nigerian Context

It is worth noting that In Nigeria, the dominance of media mentions as a primary measure of public relations (PR) success is strongly influenced by both cultural and political factors. Public visibility is frequently equated with organizational power, social influence,

and political clout, leading institutions to prioritize newspaper coverage, radio, and televised appearances as symbols of legitimacy (Oso & Pate, 2011). Nwosu (2017) notes that Nigerian public relations (PR) practitioners often present press clippings and media coverage reports to clients as evidence of effectiveness, reinforcing a visibility-centric paradigm. While these practices demonstrate short-term publicity, they provide limited insight into whether communication campaigns genuinely shaped stakeholder attitudes, influenced public policy, or enhanced trust and long-term relational equity.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the urgent need for more robust, outcome-oriented systematic assessment conceptual approaches when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context. Ekanem (2019) contends that effective public relations (PR) measurement should extend beyond outputs to assess stakeholder engagement, behavior change, and community impact, particularly in critical sectors such as health promotion, electoral processes, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Furthermore, challenges such as institutional weaknesses, political interference, and varying organizational capacities contribute to inconsistent systematic assessment practices, hindering the professionalization of public relations (PR) in the country.

Despite these challenges, the scholarly discourse increasingly calls for conceptual and empirical advancements that integrate global best practices with local realities. Yet, empirical studies documenting systematic public relations (PR) systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context remain limited, making conceptual analyses like the present analysis essential for shaping standards, guiding practitioners, and informing policy. By highlighting these contextual nuances, this scholarly inquiry underscores the importance of adopting multidimensional systematic assessment conceptual approaches that capture both organizational performance and societal impact, thereby enhancing the credibility, accountability, and strategic relevance of public relations (PR) when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context.

3.3 Identified Gaps

Overreliance on visibility metrics such as mentions and AVE.

Limited application of global standards like the Barcelona Principles.

Lack of culturally adapted conceptual approaches that consider Nigeria's linguistic diversity, digital divide, and political environment.

4. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Limitations of Media Mentions

Media Ownership and Bias: Nigerian media outlets are influenced by political affiliations, making mentions unreliable (Oso & Pate, 2011).

Quantity over Quality: A high number of mentions does not equal positive perception or behavioral change.

Language Barriers: Media mentions in English may not resonate with grassroots audiences, where Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin dominate communication.

Superficial Measurement: Visibility does not capture trust, credibility, or engagement.

4.2 Toward Holistic public relations (PR) Evaluation when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context

Anchored in Excellence Theory and Barcelona Principles, a Nigerian-oriented conceptual approach should include:

1. **Audience Engagement** – Measured through social media interactions, community participation, and grassroots mobilization.
2. **Message Resonance** – Evaluating comprehension in local languages and cultural contexts.
3. **Trust and Relationship Metrics** – Assessing confidence and satisfaction through surveys and stakeholder feedback.
4. **Behavioral Outcomes** – Determining whether campaigns influence tangible actions, e.g., voter registration or health practices.
5. **Policy Influence** – Measuring shifts in legislation or government responsiveness linked to public relations (PR) campaigns.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The systematic assessment of Public Relations (public relations (PR)) has long been a subject of debate, with practitioners and scholars striving to establish credible methods that reflect the discipline's true value. In Nigeria, the dominance of media mentions, press clippings, and advertising value equivalency as systematic assessment metrics reflects both cultural preferences for visibility and institutional reliance on publicity as evidence of success. While such conceptual approaches provide a measure of exposure, they fall short of adequately to capture the deeper and more strategic contributions of public relations (PR) to organizational legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and societal transformation.

Anchored on the Excellence Theory, the present analysis has argued that public relations (PR) should be positioned not as a publicity tool but as a strategic management function that fosters two-way symmetrical communication and long-term relationship building. Within this paradigm, measurement and systematic assessment must move beyond outputs to focus on trust, credibility, satisfaction, and mutual understanding. Similarly, the Barcelona Principles offer a globally recognized conceptual approach for outcome-based measurement, rejecting AVE and emphasising transparency, integration, and alignment with organizational goals. Together, these conceptual approach provide both the theoretical and practical foundation for a redefined conceptual approach to public relations (PR) systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context.

The Nigerian context presents unique challenges and opportunities. The country's vibrant yet it must be acknowledged politically polarized media environment, coupled with linguistic and cultural diversity, makes media mentions an insufficient metric of success. Moreover, the rise of digital media, particularly among Nigeria's youthful population, demands new indicators such as digital engagement, message resonance across languages, and community participation. Public Relations (PR) systematic assessment must as a result be holistic, blending traditional metrics with innovative conceptual approaches that reflect Nigeria's realities.

Conceptually, the present analysis contributes to public relations (PR) scholarship in three ways. First, it critiques the overreliance on media-centric systematic assessment with when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context practice, exposing its inadequacies. Second, it contextualizes global conceptual approaches such as the Barcelona Principles with when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context's socio-political and cultural realities, offering a pathway for adaptation. Third, it advances theory-building by integrating Excellence Theory's relational perspective with practical measurement tools, as a result bridging the gap between academic discourse and professional application.

For the Nigerian public relations (PR) profession to advance, practitioners, educators, and policymakers must embrace systematic assessment conceptual approaches that demonstrate outcomes and impact, not just visibility. Professional associations such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) can play a leading role by developing training programs, promoting adoption of global standards, and encouraging context-sensitive innovation. At the same time, scholars should pursue empirical research that tests these conceptual approach when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context settings, such as electoral communication, corporate social responsibility, and public health campaigns.

Ultimately, moving beyond media mentions is not only about improving professional practice, it is about elevating the status of public relations (PR) as a strategic discipline capable of shaping policy, influencing behavior, and contributing to Nigeria's development goals. Only when public relations (PR) is measured in terms of relationships, outcomes, and societal value will it achieve the recognition it deserves as a vital instrument for democratic governance, corporate accountability, and social progress.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conceptual analysis in the present analysis, several recommendations are proposed for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers to advance public relations (PR) measurement and systematic assessment when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context:

6.1 For Practitioners

- 1. Adopt Holistic Frameworks:** public relations (PR) practitioners when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context should integrate the Barcelona Principles and AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework into their practice, focusing on outcomes such as trust, behavioral change, and policy influence rather than media mentions alone.
- 2. Develop Localized Metrics:** Measurement tools should reflect Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity, including indicators of message resonance in Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Pidgin, and other local languages.
- 3. Leverage Digital Platforms:** With Nigeria's growing youth population actively engaging on social media, practitioners should track engagement metrics such as shares, retweets, and community mobilization as evidence of communication impact.
- 4. Prioritize Relationship Management:** Practitioners should measure trust, credibility, and satisfaction levels among stakeholders, which are more sustainable indicators of public relations (PR) effectiveness than mere publicity.

6.2 For Professional Bodies

- 1. Capacity Building:** The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and related associations should organize continuous professional development workshops on systematic assessment methods that align with global standards.
- 2. Policy Guidelines:** Professional bodies should issue clear guidelines discouraging the use of Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) and encouraging multidimensional systematic assessment.
- 3. Standardization:** Developing a national conceptual approach for public relations (PR) measurement will help unify practice across sectors and improve credibility.

6.3 For Scholars and Researchers

- 1. Empirical Studies:** Future research should test how conceptual approach like the Barcelona Principles apply when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context contexts such as elections, corporate social responsibility, and health communication.
- 2. Theoretical Development:** Scholars should expand on Excellence Theory by incorporating African cultural perspectives, thereby enriching global public relations (PR) scholarship.
- 3. Interdisciplinary Research:** Collaboration with political science, sociology, and development studies will strengthen the analysis of public relations (PR)'s societal impact when examined within the Nigerian socio-political and cultural context.

6.4 For Policymakers and Organizations

- 1. Institutionalize public relations (PR) Measurement:** Government ministries, NGOs, and corporations should adopt structured systematic assessment systems that track social outcomes such as policy adoption, community trust, and citizen participation.

2. Funding and Support: Investment in affordable measurement tools and analytics will make outcome-based systematic assessment more accessible to public relations (PR) agencies and departments.

REFERENCES

1. AMEC. (2020). *Barcelona Principles 3.0: Principles for measurement of communication*. Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication.
2. AMEC. (2020). *AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework*. Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication.
3. Ekanem, T. (2019). Public relations and stakeholder engagement in Nigeria: Toward outcome-oriented evaluation. *Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 16(2), 45–61.
4. Grunig, J. E. (2006). Furnishing the edifice: Ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(2), 151–176.
5. Grunig, J. E., & Grunig, L. A. (1992). Models of public relations and communication. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 285–325). Lawrence Erlbaum.
6. Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
7. Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., & Dozier, D. M. (2002). *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
8. Macnamara, J. (2014). Emerging international standards for measurement and evaluation of public relations: A critical analysis. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(1), 7–29.
9. Macnamara, J. (2018). *Evaluating public communication: Exploring new models, standards, and best practice*. Routledge.
10. Macnamara, J., & Gregory, A. (2018). Expanding evaluation to progress strategic communication: Beyond message tracking to open listening. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 469–486.
11. Michaelson, D., & Stacks, D. W. (2011). Standardization in public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Journal*, 5(2), 1–22.
12. Nwosu, I. E. (2017). Public relations measurement and evaluation in Nigeria: Trends, challenges, and prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Studies*, 2(1), 23–38.
13. Okafor, G. (2019). Public relations evaluation in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives. *Nigerian Journal of Communication Studies*, 23(2), 45–59.
14. Olaleye, I. (2021). Repositioning public relations evaluation in Nigeria: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 13(1), 88–104.
15. Oso, L., & Pate, U. (2011). *Mass media and society in Nigeria*. Malthouse Press.
16. Watson, T. (2012). The evolution of public relations measurement and evaluation. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3), 390–398.
17. Watson, T. (2013). Advertising value equivalence – PR’s zombie metric. *Institute form Public Relations*.
18. Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2014). *Evaluating public relations: A guide to planning, research, and measurement*. Kogan Page.
19. Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., & Volk, S. C. (2021). Communication evaluation and measurement: Skills, practices and utilization in European organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1), 101–118.