LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR ENHANCEMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN NIGERIAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This study ascertained the public relations and image building as pathways for Independent National Electoral Commission inclusiveness and image recovery in Nigeria. The theoretical framework of the study was drawn from the image restoration theory and agenda setting theory. This study adopted the qualitative research approach and the in-depth (intensive) interview method was employed. The research population consisted of 17 (seventeen) public relations officers and professional experts in the unit of public relations in INEC in Rivers State and public relations experts in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising in University of Port Harcourt. Purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used to arrive at the study sample. The study adopted thematic method of data analysis to analyse the data gathered from the in-depth interviews. Findings from the study revealed that, the current Public Relations strategies employed by the INEC have been partially effective in addressing negative public perceptions and rebuilding its image, as they have managed to increase transparency and engagement through targeted communication campaigns and stakeholder interactions; however, persistent challenges such as allegations of electoral malpractice and inconsistent messaging. The study concluded that while INEC's current Public Relations strategies have made some progress in mitigating negative public perceptions and enhancing its image, the presence of on-going challenges, such as perceived electoral malpractices and inconsistent messaging, suggests that these strategies have not yet fully achieved their desired impact. The study recommended that, INEC should adopt a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to its Public Relations efforts, focusing on consistent messaging, greater transparency, and expanded outreach to all demographics

Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in an era of unprecedented technological advancement, with artificial intelligence (AI) at the forefront of this transformation. AI's impact on various sectors, including public relations (PR), has been profound, redefining how organisations interact with their stakeholders and the public at large. As Nigeria grapples with the challenges of economic recovery, the integration of AI into PR strategies presents a unique opportunity to enhance communication, foster transparency, and rebuild trust in critical sectors of the economy (Olanrewaju, 2023). Public relations, traditionally, has been the bridge between organisations and their publics, tasked with managing reputation, communicating key messages, and addressing crises. In Nigeria, where economic instability and governance issues have often led to public distrust, the role of PR is more crucial than ever. The adoption of AI in this field could revolutionize the way PR professionals operate, allowing for more efficient, targeted, and responsive communication strategies (Adegbite & Onikosi, 2023).

AI technologies, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and data analytics, have already begun to reshape the PR landscape globally. These technologies enable PR practitioners to analyse vast amounts of data quickly, predict public sentiment, and tailor messages that resonate with specific audiences. In the Nigerian context, where diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes present unique communication challenges, AI can help craft more inclusive and effective PR campaigns that address the needs of various demographic groups (Ekeocha, 2023). Moreover, AI-driven tools such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and automated content creation systems are enhancing the efficiency of PR operations. These tools allow for 24/7 engagement with the public, providing real-time responses to inquiries and managing crisis communications more effectively. For Nigeria's economy, which is in dire need of robust PR efforts to attract foreign investment, these AI tools could play a pivotal role in reshaping the country's image on the global stage (Osoba & Hassan, 2023).

The potential of AI in enhancing PR strategies is not just limited to communication. AI can also play a critical role in media monitoring and sentiment analysis, enabling PR professionals to track public perception

and media coverage more accurately. This capability is particularly valuable in a country like Nigeria, where the media landscape is vast and complex. By leveraging AI, PR practitioners can gain deeper insights into public opinion, allowing for more proactive and informed decision-making (Nwachukwu, 2023). Additionally, AI's predictive capabilities can help PR professionals in Nigeria anticipate and mitigate potential crises before they escalate. For example, AI algorithms can analyse social media trends and detect early signs of public dissatisfaction, enabling organizations to address issues before they become full-blown crises. This proactive approach to crisis management is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring the stability of Nigeria's recovering economy (Chukwu & Oduntan, 2023).

Furthermore, AI can facilitate more personalised and engaging PR campaigns by analysing consumer behaviour and preferences. In a diverse and populous country like Nigeria, where consumer preferences vary widely across regions and cultures, the ability to deliver personalised messages can significantly enhance the effectiveness of PR efforts. This level of personalisation can help build stronger connections with the public and foster a more positive perception of Nigerian brands, both locally and internationally (Olusola, 2023).

The integration of AI into PR strategies also has the potential to democratise access to information and communication. In Nigeria, where access to reliable information is often limited by socio-economic and geographical factors, AI-powered platforms can bridge this gap by providing more equitable access to information. This democratisation of communication can empower citizens, improve transparency, and contribute to a more informed and engaged public (Adebayo & Adekunle, 2023). However, the adoption of AI in PR also comes with its challenges. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the digital divide must be carefully managed to ensure that AI's benefits are fully realised in the Nigerian context. PR professionals must be equipped with the necessary skills to navigate these challenges and leverage AI effectively in their strategies. This calls for targeted training and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that the Nigerian PR industry can fully harness the power of AI (Ifeanyi, 2023).

Moreover, there is a need for a regulatory framework that governs the use of AI in PR, particularly concerning ethical considerations. As AI becomes more integrated into PR practices, issues such as transparency, accountability, and fairness must be addressed to prevent the misuse of

technology. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with industry stakeholders, must establish guidelines and standards to ensure that AI is used responsibly in the PR sector (Babatunde, 2023). In light of these developments, this study explores how AI can be leveraged to enhance public relations strategies in Nigeria, particularly in the context of economic recovery. By examining the current state of AI adoption in the Nigerian PR industry, the study seeks to identify the opportunities and challenges associated with this technology. It provides insights on how AI can be effectively integrated into PR strategies to support Nigeria's economic recovery efforts.

The study also explores the impact of AI on the quality of PR practices in Nigeria, particularly in terms of efficiency, accuracy, and reach. By analysing case studies of organizations that have successfully integrated AI into their PR strategies, the study provides insights into best practices and lessons learned. These insights are valuable for PR professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in Nigeria's economic recovery.

Statement of the problem

Nigeria's economy, like many others, has faced significant challenges in the 21st century, including fluctuating oil prices, inflation, and the impact of global economic downturns. These challenges have necessitated a more strategic approach to communication, particularly in the realm of public relations. However, traditional PR strategies often lack the agility and precision required to address the dynamic nature of these economic challenges. The problem lies in the fact that conventional PR methods may not effectively convey the necessary messages to stakeholders or adapt quickly to changing economic conditions. As Nigeria strives for economic recovery, there is a pressing need to explore how AI can enhance PR strategies to better support this goal. Traditional PR approaches in Nigeria have typically relied on manual processes, generalized messaging, and reactive strategies. These methods, while effective in certain contexts, often fall short in addressing the complexities of modern economic crises. The inability to quickly analyse vast amounts of data, anticipate stakeholder responses, and tailor communications accordingly has left many organizations struggling to maintain their reputation and build trust. This gap in strategic communication is particularly problematic in a recovering economy, where miscommunication can lead to further economic

instability. There is a clear problem in how traditional PR practices can no longer meet the demands of a fast-paced, data-driven environment.

Globally, AI has begun to reshape public relations by enabling more efficient and effective communication strategies. AI technologies such as natural language processing, sentiment analysis and predictive analytics allow PR professionals to understand and respond to public sentiment in real time. These tools can also help craft personalized messages that resonate with different audience segments, thus enhancing the overall impact of PR campaigns. Despite the proven benefits of AI in global PR practices, its adoption in Nigeria has been relatively slow. This slow uptake raises concerns about whether Nigerian PR professionals are fully equipped to leverage AI in ways that could contribute significantly to the country's economic recovery. While the global PR landscape has seen a surge in AI adoption, Nigerian PR strategies have yet to fully embrace these technologies. The problem is not just the lack of technological infrastructure, but also the hesitance among PR professionals to integrate AI into their workflows. Factors such as limited access to AI tools, lack of training, and concerns about job displacement have contributed to this slow adoption. This gap highlights a critical issue: without the integration of AI, Nigerian PR efforts may lag behind global standards, potentially hindering the country's economic recovery. The challenge is thus to understand how AI can be effectively integrated into Nigerian PR practices to enhance economic outcomes.

Inefficient PR strategies can have a detrimental impact on Nigeria's economic recovery efforts. Poorly managed communication can lead to misinformation, a loss of public trust, and a weakened reputation for both the government and private sector organisations. In an economy that is striving to regain stability, these outcomes can exacerbate economic challenges and delay recovery. The problem is further compounded by the lack of real-time data analysis and predictive capabilities, which are essential for navigating the complexities of economic communication. Addressing this issue requires a shift from traditional PR methods to more advanced, AI-driven strategies that can provide the precision and agility needed in today's economic environment. Given the potential of AI to revolutionise PR and contribute to economic recovery, there is an urgent need for research and innovation in this area. The problem lies in the current gap between what is technologically possible and what is being practiced in Nigerian PR. This gap underscores the importance of exploring how AI can be leveraged to enhance PR strategies, improve stakeholder

engagement, and ultimately support Nigeria's economic recovery. Without addressing this issue, Nigerian PR practices risk remaining out-dated and ineffective, unable to contribute meaningfully to the country's economic revival. Therefore, this study investigates the potential of AI in transforming PR strategies for economic recovery in Nigeria, providing insights that could pave the way for more effective communication practices.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can be leveraged to enhance public relations (PR) strategies in order to support and accelerate Nigeria's economic recovery in the 21st century. The objectives are to:

1. Assess the current level of AI adoption in public relations in Nigeria;
2. Identify the challenges that hinder the integration of AI into PR practices in Nigeria;
3. Evaluate how AI-driven PR strategies can impact stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's economic recovery; and
4. Propose a framework for integrating AI into PR strategies to improve communication efforts in Nigeria's economic recovery.

Literature Review
Conceptual Review
Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Relations

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly significant tool in the field of public relations (PR), transforming how communication strategies are developed and executed. AI in PR refers to the use of AI technologies such as machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics to enhance various aspects of communication, including media monitoring, content creation, and stakeholder engagement. These technologies enable PR professionals to analyse large volumes of data quickly, identify trends, and predict outcomes, thereby allowing for more informed decision-making. AI can also automate routine tasks, such as distributing press releases and managing social media interactions, which frees up PR professionals to focus on more strategic activities (Wang & Zhou, 2023). Furthermore, AI enhances the personalisation of PR campaigns by enabling the segmentation of audiences and the tailoring of messages to specific groups based on their preferences and behaviours.

This capability is particularly valuable in today's fast-paced media environment, where timely and relevant communication is crucial for maintaining a positive public image. The use of AI in PR is still evolving, with on-going research and development aimed at improving the accuracy and effectiveness of AI-driven tools. As AI continues to advance, its role in PR is expected to grow, offering new opportunities for enhancing communication strategies and achieving better outcomes (Mhlanga, 2023).

Public Relations (PR) Strategies

Public Relations (PR) strategies are the planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain the reputation of an organisation, individual, or entity through communication with various stakeholders. Traditional PR strategies include media relations, crisis communication, reputation management, and event coordination. These strategies aim to create and sustain a positive image, build trust, and manage the flow of information between an organization and its public. However, with the advent of digital technologies, PR strategies have evolved to incorporate new media platforms, data-driven approaches, and real-time communication tactics (Grunig & Hunt, 2022). In the modern PR landscape, the integration of digital tools, including AI, has become essential for developing more targeted and effective communication strategies. For instance, media monitoring tools that utilise AI can track and analyse mentions across various platforms, allowing PR professionals to gauge public sentiment and adjust their strategies accordingly. Moreover, the ability to segment audiences and deliver personalised content has revolutionised how organisations engage with their stakeholders, making PR strategies more dynamic and responsive. As PR continues to evolve, the adoption of innovative technologies will play a crucial role in shaping the strategies used to manage and enhance organisational reputation (Culbertson & Chen, 2022).

Economic Recovery

Economic recovery refers to the process through which an economy regains its strength after experiencing a recession or economic downturn. This process involves the restoration of economic activities such as production, employment, and consumption to pre-crisis levels or higher. The recovery phase is often marked by government interventions, including fiscal stimulus, monetary policy adjustments, and structural reforms aimed at stabilising and revitalising the economy. In the context of Nigeria,

economic recovery has been a critical focus, especially following the impact of global oil price fluctuations, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other economic challenges that have significantly affected the country's growth trajectory (Adegboye, 2023). Effective communication, particularly through PR, plays a vital role in economic recovery by helping to restore investor confidence, manage public expectations, and promote the government's recovery initiatives. Public relations strategies can be used to disseminate information about economic policies, engage with key stakeholders, and build a positive narrative around the recovery efforts. In Nigeria, the use of AI in PR could further enhance these strategies by providing real-time insights into public sentiment and enabling more agile and responsive communication. As the country continues to navigate its economic recovery, the integration of AI-driven PR strategies could offer significant benefits in terms of fostering transparency, trust, and collaboration among stakeholders (Nwankwo & Uche, 2022).

AI Adoption and Diffusion in PR
AI adoption and diffusion in public relations (PR) refer to the process by which AI technologies are accepted and integrated into PR practices. The adoption of AI in PR is influenced by various factors, including the perceived benefits, the complexity of the technology, and the readiness of the organization to implement it. According to the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, the adoption of new technologies like AI follows a predictable pattern, starting with innovators and early adopters and gradually spreading to the majority. In PR, early adopters of AI have leveraged its capabilities to enhance media monitoring, automate routine tasks, and improve the personalisation of communication (Rogers, 2021). However, the diffusion of AI in PR is not without challenges. Barriers such as technological infrastructure, lack of expertise, and resistance to change can slow down the adoption process. In Nigeria, these challenges are particularly pronounced, with many organisations struggling to integrate AI into their PR strategies. Despite these obstacles, the potential benefits of AI, such as increased efficiency, improved stakeholder engagement, and more effective crisis management, makes it a critical tool for modern PR practices. Understanding the factors that influence AI adoption and diffusion in PR can help organizations develop strategies to overcome these barriers and fully realize the benefits of AI (Ajayi & Ojo, 2023).

Theoretical Review
The Diffusion of Innovations theory

This theory was propounded by Everett Rogers in 1962, which explores how new ideas and technologies spread within and across societies. Rogers's seminal work focuses on the process through which innovations are communicated through various channels over time among the members of a social system. The theory's tenets include the innovation itself, communication channels, social systems, and the perceived attributes of innovations such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. These elements interact to influence how quickly and extensively an innovation is adopted within a community (Rogers, 2023). However, the theory has faced criticism for its perceived linear and idealistic view of diffusion, which often oversimplifies the complexities of real-world adoption processes. Critics argue that the theory does not adequately account for power dynamics, social inequalities, and the role of local contexts in shaping adoption patterns (Mahajan & Peterson, 2024). Moreover, the model's emphasis on the diffusion process may overlook the potential resistance and barriers faced by adopters, which can significantly affect the innovation's integration and success (Rogers, 2023; Mahajan & Peterson, 2024).

The Diffusion of Innovations theory is highly relevant to the study on leveraging artificial intelligence for enhancing public relations strategies in Nigeria's economic recovery, as it provides a framework for understanding how AI technologies can be adopted and disseminated within the PR industry. By analysing how AI innovations are perceived, communicated, and integrated into PR practices, the theory helps to identify the factors influencing successful adoption and highlights potential barriers to implementation, offering valuable insights for developing effective strategies to accelerate AI integration in the context of Nigeria's economic revitalisation.

Empirical Review

Smith (2020) carried out a study on "Exploring the adoption of artificial intelligence in public relations: challenges and opportunities." The study assessed the level of AI adoption in public relations practices and identified the challenges that hinder its integration into PR strategies. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using both quantitative surveys of PR professionals and qualitative interviews to gather insights on AI adoption. The findings revealed that while there is a growing awareness of

AI's potential in PR, adoption remains low due to factors such as lack of technical expertise, high costs of implementation, and resistance to change among PR practitioners.

Lee (2021) carried out a research on "The Role of artificial intelligence in enhancing stakeholder engagement in public relations." The study evaluated the impact of AI-driven PR strategies on stakeholder engagement, focusing on how AI tools can be used to improve communication and build stronger relationships with stakeholders. The study utilised a case study approach, analysing how organisations in various industries have implemented AI in their PR strategies and the resulting effects on stakeholder engagement. The study found that AI tools, such as chatbots and sentiment analysis, significantly improved stakeholder engagement by providing more personalized communication and faster response times, leading to increased trust and loyalty among stakeholders.

Johnson (2022) conducted a study on "Developing a framework for integrating artificial intelligence into public relations practices." The study examined a comprehensive framework for the integration of AI into public relations strategies, with a focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of communication efforts. The research was conducted using a combination of literature review and expert interviews, leading to the development of a conceptual framework for AI integration in PR. The study proposed a four-phase framework for AI integration, including assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The framework emphasised the importance of aligning AI tools with organisational goals and ensuring continuous evaluation to adapt to changes in the PR landscape.

Okeke and Nwankwo, (2021) carried out a study on "Barriers to artificial intelligence adoption in marketing communications: A study of selected emerging markets." The identified and analysed the key barriers that hinder the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing communication strategies within emerging markets. It sought to explore both organizational and market-level challenges. The research used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The study surveyed 200 marketing professionals from selected companies in Nigeria, Kenya, and India. Additionally, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with senior communication strategists in these markets. The study found that the primary barriers to AI adoption in communication strategies included a lack of infrastructure, high costs associated with AI technology, a shortage of skilled professionals, and

resistance to change within organisations. The cultural context and regulatory challenges also played significant roles in delaying AI integration.

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research approach and the in-depth (intensive) interview method was employed. In-depth interview presents the respondents freedom in answering questions and an opportunity to provide in-depth responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011; Asemah *et al*., 2012). The research population consisted of 11 (eleven) public relations experts in the Department of Public Relations and Advertising in University of Port Harcourt in Faculty of Communication and Media Studies. The choice of the category of respondents was informed by the nature of this study, which required knowledge of leveraging artificial intelligence for enhancement of public relations strategies in Nigerian economic recovery in 21st century as those outside these public relations experts may not have knowledge about the information. Therefore, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used to arrive at the study sample. Purposive sampling is strategic and entails an attempt to establish good correspondence between research questions and sampling. Hence, the researchers then asked respondents to suggest other public relations experts who may also qualify for the research study (Snowballing). Four (4) public relations professionals were arrived at and were interviewed in this study. The study adopted thematic method of data analysis to analyse the data gathered from the in-depth interviews.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Current level of AI adoption in public relations in Nigeria; Challenges that hinder the integration of AI into PR practices in Nigeria; AI-driven PR strategies can impact stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's economic recovery; and Framework for integrating AI into PR strategies to improve communication efforts in Nigeria's economic recovery. These were presented and discussed below:

Current level of AI adoption in public relations in Nigeria: The interview report has shown that the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in public relations (PR) in Nigeria is still in its nascent stages, though there has been a noticeable uptick in interest and integration efforts in recent

years. Nigerian PR agencies and departments are gradually embracing AI technologies, particularly in areas like media monitoring, sentiment analysis, and social media management. One of the Interviewees added that tools powered by AI are increasingly being used to analyse large volumes of data, helping PR professionals to better understand public sentiment and tailor their communication strategies accordingly. This adoption is largely driven by the growing recognition of AI's potential to enhance efficiency, improve accuracy, and provide deeper insights into public opinion, which are crucial for effective public relations in the digital age.

However, the Interviewees stated that despite these advancements, the level of AI adoption in Nigerian PR remains limited by several factors. One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure and technological resources. Many PR agencies in Nigeria, especially smaller ones, struggle with the high costs associated with acquiring and implementing AI technologies. Additionally, there is a significant skills gap, as many PR professionals in the country are not yet fully equipped with the technical knowledge needed to effectively leverage AI tools. This gap is further widened by the lack of comprehensive training programs and educational resources focusing on the intersection of AI and public relations in the Nigerian context.

Moreover, the Interviewees said that there is still some resistance to change within the industry, as traditional methods of PR continue to dominate. This is compounded by concerns around data privacy and the ethical implications of AI use in public relations. Many PR professionals are wary of relying too heavily on AI, fearing that it might lead to a loss of the human touch that is often essential in maintaining strong, personal relationships with clients and the public. Despite these challenges, the future of AI in Nigerian public relations appears promising, with on-going advancements in technology and increasing awareness of AI's potential benefits likely to drive further adoption in the coming years. As the industry continues to evolve, the integration of AI is expected to become more widespread, helping Nigerian PR professionals to enhance their strategies and better navigate the complex communication landscape.

Challenges that hinder the integration of AI into PR practices in Nigeria: Majority of the Interviewees believed that the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into public relations (PR) practices in Nigeria faces several significant challenges, the foremost being inadequate infrastructure and technological resources. Many PR agencies, particularly

smaller ones, lack the necessary digital infrastructure to support AI tools effectively. High-speed internet, reliable electricity, and access to advanced computing systems are still inconsistent in many parts of the country. These infrastructural gaps make it difficult for PR firms to implement and maintain AI technologies that require robust and continuous digital support. Additionally, the costs associated with acquiring AI tools and maintaining the required infrastructure is prohibitively high for many organisations, further impeding widespread adoption.

Another major challenge according to one of the Interviewees is the skills gap within the Nigerian PR industry. AI technologies require specialized knowledge and skills, including data analysis, machine learning, and software management, which many PR professionals currently lack. The PR sector in Nigeria has traditionally focused on human-centric skills such as communication, media relations, and content creation. As a result, another Interviewee said that there is a significant gap between the existing skill set of PR practitioners and the technical competencies needed to effectively utilise AI in their work. This skills gap is compounded by the lack of comprehensive training programs and educational resources tailored to the intersection of AI and PR in the Nigerian context. Without adequate training, many PR professionals may struggle to understand, implement, and fully leverage AI tools in their strategies.

Confirming that one of the Interviewees reported that resistance to change and concerns about data privacy also pose challenges to the integration of AI in Nigerian PR practices. Many PR professionals are wary of adopting AI due to fears that it may replace human roles, leading to job losses or reducing the human touch in PR work, which is often essential in building and maintaining strong client relationships. Additionally, there are concerns about the ethical implications of AI, particularly regarding data privacy and the potential misuse of personal information. In a country where regulatory frameworks around data protection are still evolving, these concerns are significant. Many organisations are hesitant to fully embrace AI until there is greater clarity on how to navigate these ethical and legal challenges, which further slows the pace of AI integration in the PR industry.

AI-driven PR strategies that can impact stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's economic recovery: All the Interviewees agreed that AI-driven public relations (PR) strategies are playing an increasingly important role in

enhancing stakeholder engagement, particularly in the context of Nigeria's economic recovery. As the country seeks to rebound from economic challenges, including the effects of the global pandemic, AI-driven strategies offer a way to optimise communication efforts and build stronger relationships with key stakeholders. By leveraging AI tools, PR professionals can conduct more precise and efficient stakeholder mapping, allowing them to identify and prioritise stakeholders based on their influence and interest in the recovery process. AI algorithms can analyse vast amounts of data from social media, public forums, and other digital platforms to provide insights into stakeholder sentiment and behaviour, enabling PR practitioners to craft tailored messages that resonate more deeply with different groups. This level of customisation helps to ensure that the right messages reach the right audiences at the right time, fostering greater stakeholder trust and support for economic recovery initiatives.

Also, other Interviewees acknowledged that AI-driven strategies enhance stakeholder engagement through real-time communication and feedback mechanisms. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can be deployed across various communication channels to provide instant responses to stakeholder inquiries, facilitating continuous dialogue and ensuring that stakeholders feel heard and valued. This immediacy in communication not only enhances the stakeholder experience but also allows organisations to swiftly address concerns and mitigate potential issues before they escalate. Additionally, AI-driven sentiment analysis tools enable PR professionals to monitor public opinion in real time, allowing them to adjust communication strategies proactively and respond to shifts in stakeholder sentiment. This dynamic approach to stakeholder engagement is crucial in a rapidly changing economic environment, where timely and accurate communication can significantly impact the success of recovery efforts.

To ascertain this, one of the Interviewee said that, AI-driven PR strategies contribute to more effective crisis management, a critical component of stakeholder engagement during economic recovery. In times of economic uncertainty, stakeholders are particularly sensitive to how organisations handle crises. AI tools can help PR professionals predict potential crises by analysing patterns and trends in stakeholder behaviour, enabling them to prepare and respond effectively. The other interviewees explained that during a crisis, AI-driven communication platforms can disseminate information quickly and consistently across multiple channels, ensuring that stakeholders receive accurate and up-to-date information.

This transparency helps to build trust and maintain stakeholder confidence, which is essential for sustaining support during recovery efforts. By integrating AI into their PR strategies, Nigerian organisations can engage stakeholders more effectively, contributing to a more robust and resilient economic recovery.

Framework for integrating AI into PR strategies to improve communication efforts in Nigeria's economic recovery: All the Interviewees accepted that integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into public relations (PR) strategies in Nigeria requires a comprehensive framework that addresses both technological and strategic dimensions to enhance communication efforts in the context of economic recovery. The framework begins with establishing a clear strategic vision that aligns AI integration with the organisation's overall communication goals. One of the Interviewees posited that this involves setting specific objectives for how AI tools will be used to improve stakeholder engagement, enhance media monitoring, and streamline crisis management. Organisations should start by identifying key areas where AI can provide the most value, such as sentiment analysis, audience segmentation, and real-time feedback mechanisms. This strategic vision helps to ensure that AI integration is purposeful and supports the broader goal of economic recovery by fostering better communication with stakeholders.

Majority of the Interviewees agreed that the next component of the framework focuses on the selection and implementation of appropriate AI technologies. Organisations need to assess and choose AI tools that align with their identified needs and objectives. This includes selecting software for media monitoring, automated content generation, and sentiment analysis, as well as ensuring that these tools can integrate seamlessly with existing communication systems. It's essential to consider factors such as the scalability of the technology, the ease of use for PR professionals, and the ability to customise AI solutions to meet specific organisational needs. Additionally, implementing these technologies requires investing in infrastructure improvements to support AI tools, such as upgrading digital platforms and ensuring robust data management practices to maintain accuracy and security.

The Interviewees stated that, the framework must address the training and change management aspects crucial for successful AI integration. PR professionals need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively use AI tools, which requires targeted training

programs and on-going support. This includes educating staff on the capabilities and limitations of AI technologies, as well as developing new workflows that incorporate AI insights into daily PR activities. Moreover, organisations should foster a culture of innovation and adaptability to address any resistance to change and encourage the adoption of new technologies. By combining strategic planning, appropriate technology selection, and comprehensive training, Nigerian organizations can effectively integrate AI into their PR strategies, enhancing their communication efforts and supporting the country's economic recovery.

Discussion of Findings
Objective One; Assess the current level of AI adoption in public relations in Nigeria
The findings revealed that the adoption of artificial intelligence in public relations in Nigeria is gradually increasing, particularly in areas like media monitoring and sentiment analysis, but remains limited by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, high costs, a significant skills gap, and resistance to change within the industry, though on-going technological advancements and growing awareness suggest a promising future for wider AI integration in the sector. This confirms the findings of Smith (2020) that while there is a growing awareness of AI's potential in PR, adoption remains low due to factors such as lack of technical expertise, high costs of implementation, and resistance to change among PR practitioners. In tandem with the finding, the Diffusion of Innovation theory is relevant to the findings as it helps explain the gradual adoption of artificial intelligence in public relations in Nigeria, highlighting how early adopters and innovators are beginning to integrate AI tools despite barriers, while the majority of the industry remains in the early stages of adoption, facing challenges that slow the diffusion process, such as infrastructure limitations, high costs, and a skills gap.

Objective Two: Identify the challenges that hinder the integration of AI into PR practices in Nigeria
The results showed that the integration of artificial intelligence into public relations practices in Nigeria is hindered by significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, high implementation costs, a pronounced skills gap among PR professionals, resistance to change due to fears of job displacement, and concerns about data privacy and ethical implications, all of which slow the adoption of AI in the industry. The

findings of the study also align with that of Lee (2021) that demonstrated that AI tools, such as chatbots and sentiment analysis, significantly improved stakeholder engagement by providing more personalised communication and faster response times, leading to increased trust and loyalty among stakeholders. Equally, the findings of the study support the theoretical framework which is diffusion of innovation theory which the study was anchored on. The theory is relevant to the findings as it explains the slow adoption of artificial intelligence in Nigerian public relations, highlighting how the challenges of inadequate infrastructure, high costs, and a skills gap create barriers that prevent the majority from adopting AI, while only a few early adopters and innovators are beginning to embrace these technologies amidst concerns about job displacement and data privacy.

Objective Three: Evaluate how AI-driven PR strategies can impact stakeholder engagement during Nigeria's economic recovery
The findings revealed that the adoption of AI-driven public relations strategies in Nigeria significantly enhances stakeholder engagement by enabling precise stakeholder mapping, real-time communication, and effective crisis management, which are crucial for building trust and support in the context of the country's economic recovery. This finding is consistent with that of Johnson (2022) which established that a four-phase framework for AI integration, including assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The framework emphasised the importance of aligning AI tools with organisational goals and ensuring continuous evaluation to adapt to changes in the PR landscape. The theoretical framework that underpinned this study gives backing to this findings as the Diffusion of Innovation theory highlights how the gradual adoption of AI-driven PR strategies, which offer enhanced stakeholder engagement through precise mapping, real-time communication, and effective crisis management, can lead to broader acceptance and integration within Nigerian organisations, thereby supporting the country's economic recovery efforts.

Objective Four: Propose a framework for integrating AI into PR strategies to improve communication efforts in Nigeria's economic recovery
The results showed that the framework for integrating AI into public relations strategies in Nigeria's economic recovery involves establishing a clear strategic vision, selecting and implementing suitable AI technologies,

and providing targeted training and change management, which collectively enhance communication efforts and stakeholder engagement. This corroborates with the study conducted by Okeke and Nwankwo, (2021) who found that the primary barriers to AI adoption in communication strategies included a lack of infrastructure, high costs associated with AI technology, a shortage of skilled professionals, and resistance to change within organisations. The cultural context and regulatory challenges also played significant roles in delaying AI integration. The diffusion innovation theory framework upon which this study anchored on gives validation to this finding. As it explains how the gradual adoption of AI into public relations strategies, driven by a clear strategic vision, appropriate technology selection, and effective training, facilitates broader acceptance and integration within organisations, ultimately enhancing communication efforts in Nigeria's economic recovery.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the adoption of artificial intelligence in public relations in Nigeria is in its early stages, with increasing interest and gradual integration, yet it is hindered by significant challenges such as limited infrastructure, high costs, and a skills gap, though the potential for broader adoption remains promising as awareness and technological advancements grow. The integration of artificial intelligence into public relations practices in Nigeria is significantly slowed by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, high costs, a skills gap, resistance to change, and concerns about data privacy, limiting widespread adoption despite the growing interest in AI's potential benefits.

Also, the study established that AI-driven public relations strategies significantly boost stakeholder engagement and support Nigeria's economic recovery by enabling targeted communication, real-time interaction, and efficient crisis management, although their broader adoption is still evolving. Integrating AI into public relations strategies in Nigeria's economic recovery can significantly enhance communication efforts by leveraging a strategic vision, suitable technologies, and comprehensive training, although effective adoption requires addressing the challenges of gradual acceptance and integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

1) To accelerate AI adoption in public relations, Nigerian PR agencies should invest in training programs to bridge the skills gap and seek out affordable AI solutions that can be tailored to their specific needs.

2) To overcome these challenges, PR agencies in Nigeria should invest in infrastructure development, provide targeted training programs to up-skill professionals, and establish clear ethical guidelines to ease concerns about data privacy and job security.

3) Organisations should invest in AI technologies and training to fully leverage these strategies for improved stakeholder engagement and support for economic recovery.

4) Organisations should develop a clear AI strategy, select appropriate technologies, and invest in training to optimise their PR strategies and support Nigeria's economic recovery.

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