

## **An Analysis of the Public Relations Approach adopted in Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos to handle Sex-for-Grades Situations**

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**Abstract.** Public Relations has become generally accepted as an important element of business, government and all aspect of everyday life. Being that it is a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics, its approach to the sex for grade situation in the Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos justify the importance of the practice to any organisation. With the excellence and systems theories as the theoretical framework, the study qualitatively assessed and analysed the press releases from the universities cum in-depth interviews with the public relations heads of both institutions. The findings shows that the universities carried out some public relations activities proactively that could have avoided the scandal such as issuance of press releases that informed the publics of the authorities zero tolerance for the unwholesome practice of sex-for-grades. The study among others recommends that heads of public relations of higher institutions be made part of management of the universities to enable for full public relations activities and practice to ensure the image and reputation of the tertiary institutions are properly handled.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Ivory Towers, Approach, Sex-for-grades, Publics, Scandal etc.

### **1. Background to the Study**

Public relations have proven to be an indispensable tool for both the public and private sector organisations. Public relations are an excellent and cost-effective method of improving the identity, image and reputation of an individual, corporation, social groups, products or services. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) notes that public relations practice is a management function that identifies, establishes

and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends. It is obvious that an organisation may survive only to a short extend without public relations; but a planned public relations programme can produce much better results, enhance reputation and minimize damage when crises erupts. Public relations as approved by the World Assembly of Public Relations (2019) sees the practice as the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organisation leadership and implementing planned programme of action that serve both the organisation and the publics' interest. Public relations practices encompass a broad range of activities that can lead to a clear understanding on how it differs from marketing and advertising. The goals of each practice differ in important ways.

Public relations practice promote peaceful industrial climate, higher productivity, corporate discipline, convinces people about the institution's credibility, performance, potential and the quality of its products or services. It spans a broad array of tactics and strategies to improve the stature within organisations and their publics such as the university. University is a creation of the act of parliament of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Its primary function is to faster qualitative and research driven education to middle and higher level manpower through molding of character and in learning. The ivory tower is an establishment where people from different tribes, culture, languages around the globe etc are yearly admitted after satisfying required pre-requisite examinations to further their academic pursuits. However, it seems that the purpose for the establishment of higher institutions in the country is defeated as a result of social vices and illicit practices

such as indecent dressing, cultism, rape, sorting, examination malpractices etc.

Recently, two universities in Nigeria, the Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos made news as a result of the exposure of two academic staff following their alleged sex-for-grades scandals. The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was founded in 1961 while that of the University of Lagos was established in 1962, respectively. The duos have since their inceptions been carrying out their primary assignments.

They fall within the purview of an establishment who have internal and external publics, favourably in competition with other institutions, as such, needed to shine their lights before the eyes of the general publics as a socially responsible organizations through the public relations practice.

Public relations aims at making the public think favourably about the institution, organisation, company and its offerings. According to Nikhila (2020, p.1), "The Public Relations function is now-a-days gaining importance and increasingly recognised. It has now embraced virtually every branch of human activity - whether promotion of products or image building for individuals, corporate bodies, governments, political parties educational institutions etc.

Kolk (2016), prescribes both internal and external response strategies for ameliorating reputational damage when an institution experience sexual-scandals. While he encouraged educational institutions to be proactive, flexible and listen to their internal publics, this according to him should be timely, truthful and ensure easy access to information.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Overtime, successive administrations of higher institutions, the-world-over have made concerted efforts on how best to improve academic standard devoid of molestations. Despite the efforts, unscrupulous attempts are perpetuated by some staff of the institutions to tarnish the good works of senate of the universities through divisive tendencies such as the sex-for-grade, etc.

The Guardian Newspaper report by Iyabo Lawal and Maria Diamond published on October 8, 2019 has it that Nigerian universities caught global attention. This was not because of academic breakthroughs that should earned some laurels, rather, it was because of

the escapades of some "randy" lecturers. To many out-lookers, this is no new situation as stories of such have been on the unreported gist corners. The Holy Writs of major religions frowns at the act of having carnal knowledge of the opposite sex by another without marriage.

Condemnable as this act is, and demeaning of the reputation of any citadel of learning, this study analyzed the public relations tactics of the two universities, Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos involved in handling the situation through public relations activities.

## 3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study among others were:

- To ascertain whether there are functional public relations units in both Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos.
- Find out if there are public relations activities aimed at irradiating the vices with a view to sustaining the reputation or image of the Institutions.
- Analyze the public relations activities utilized by the two institutions to launder their images.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

The study anchored on two theories; the Excellence and Systems Theories.

The excellence theory promoted by Grunig in 1992 specifies how public relations practice make organisations more effective; how it is organised and managed when it contributes most to organisational effectiveness; the conditions in the organisations and the environments that makes the organisation more effective, and how monetary value of the public relations can be determined. The excellence theory explains the value of public relations to organisations and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholders and the publics. For an organisation to be effective, according to the theory, it must behave in the ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of the stakeholders as well as of management. If it does not, stakeholders either pressure the organisation to change or oppose it in the ways that add cost and risk to organisational policies and decisions. To behave in socially acceptable ways, organisations must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organisational

decisions or who want organisations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them. Organisations must communicate symmetrically with the publics (taking the interests of both the organisation and publics into account) to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with them.

First, Public relations executives should play strategic managerial role as well as administrative manager role. Public relations also should be empowered to have access to key organisational decision-makers (the dominant coalition). Second, Public relations loses its unique role in strategic management if it is sublimated to marketing or other management functions. Third, that a symmetrical system of internal communication increases employees' satisfaction with their jobs and with the organisation - (encyclopedia of communication, 2020).

These three premises prompted the researchers to adopt this theory for the study as the obvious before most tertiary institutions is that the public relations head is not a management position, and in almost all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the Head of the public relations unit is not part of the decision-making parties of the citadel of learning. The systems theory also was promulgated by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2009). The system theory presents the public relations practitioner with the reality of the inter-connectedness of institutions with the other

components of the environment and thus compels practitioners to think about relationships. The theory looks at organizations as made up of interrelated parts, whose contributions are expedient for the survival of the organisation, and for which every institution will have to adapt and adjust to in order to embrace the changes that occur; be it in the political, economic, cultural and social environments in which the organisation operates. It is therefore required of the institutions to ensure a communication structure that guides the parts of the organisation to achieve organisational goals; this is the core of public relations. The leaders of the organisation creates and maintain these internal structures that ensure interaction-ability of both the internal and external publics of the organisation.

According to the proponents of the systems perspective, organizations depends on resources from their environments, such as raw materials (students), a source of employees (academic and non-academic staff), and clients or customers for the services or products (graduates of the university) they produce. The environment needs the organization for its products and services. Organizations with open systems use public the relations people to bring back information on how productive their relationships are with clients, customers, and other stakeholders. The researchers adopted the system theory because it explains the inter-relatedness of the Universities with the environment.

#### 4.1 Systems of a Typical Tertiary Institution

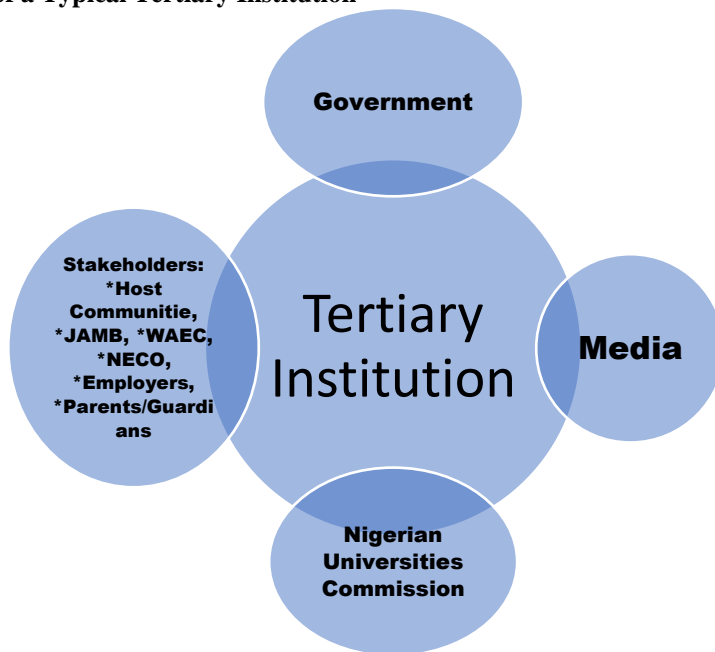


Fig. 1: Systems in the Tertiary Institution as conceptualized by the researchers

All tertiary institutions need the government to provide the enabling environment, security and laws that guarantees its operations. The media an integral system that reports all activities of the institution, and thus must be a strong ally all the time. The sources of raw materials (prospective students include the Joint Admissions and matriculation Board, the West African Examination Council, The National Examination Council, and all other examination bodies whose results are prerequisite for admission of students into the tertiary institutions. The Parents and guardians, an important aspect of the system as well as the Host Community. The National Universities Commission as well as other stakeholders are integral systems whose views are apt to ensure the continuity and integrity of the University in any part of the country.

## 5. Conceptual Review

### 5.1 Public Relations and its Goals

Nikhila (2020) chronicles some definitions of Public Relations that the researchers affirm to have explained in swift measures the crux of the practice. They are:

- Public relations practice is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public.
- Public relations is the professional attempt to achieve good public relations in order to promote the success or welfare of the company, organisation or individual on whose behalf the public relations effort is made.
- Public relations as an art and science of developing reciprocal understanding and goodwill.
- Promotion of rapport and goodwill for a person, firm or institution, and establishing a bond of relationship and contacts between two groups of public.
- Seeks to influence, solicit, or mobilize support for an idea, a cause, a problem, an institution, or an individual through communication and persuasion.
- It evaluates public attitude, identifies the policies of an organisation with public interest and executes programmes for communication.

The Princeton Review (as cited in Wynne 2016), notes that: “A public relations specialist is an image shaper. Their job is to generate positive publicity for their clients and enhance reputation ... They keep the

public informed of the activities of government agencies, explain policies and their implications, and manage political campaigns. Public relations people working for a company may handle consumer relations, or the relationship between parts of the company such as the managers and employees, or different branch offices” (p.2).

### 5.2 Types of Public Relations

There are several types of public relations activities. According to Bright Network (2020), “When it comes to companies and corporations, everyone has an opinion; customers, shareholders, the media, the government and the general public. There are dozens of viewpoints, and almost as many types of PR. Each type has a purpose, and each one suits a different type of professional” The following types of public relations are herein presented.

**Corporate and Social Responsibility:** This is a public relations activity that presents the institution or organisation as an entity and ensure that decisions of the institution are communicated as well as ascertaining that it should maintain a positive image for the company or institutions. In the modern era, people expect companies to act responsibly and to be good stewards of natural resources. Corporate Relations helps institutions, organisations and businesses show what they are doing to build goodwill with its potential customers and make positive impact on its publics. As Comcowich (2018) affirms, corporate communications professionals being the public relations team responsible for corporate relations play a leading role in advocating and promoting their organisation’s reputation to the society.

**Media Relations:** This is building relationships with media organization - reporters, writers and editors with a view to securing favourable coverage. Most often this involves cold pitching, distributing press releases, and connecting on social media. Creating good media relations requires constant effort and attention, and a mature corporate attitude towards the publics and the media. Public relations practitioners have relied on strong media relations skills and key media placements to succeed in public relations. Practitioners, executives, and clients generally have bought into the myth that public relations works with nuances of public opinion and other intangibles that simply cannot be measured (Cutlip et al., 2006). Public relations campaigns were based on practitioner hunches, knowledge of the market, and simple common sense. Practitioners used savvy media relations skills and well-honed campaign

tactics to generate media attention for publicity seeking organisations and relied on thick binders filled with clippings of their media placements to demonstrate the value of public relations to organisations.

**Employee Relations:** Employees are one of the important publics of an institution, organisation or a company. The essence of a good employee relations programme is keeping employees informed and providing them with channels of communication to all levels of management. Employee engagement and relations is summarized by Welch (2011) as, "cognitive, emotional and physical role performance characterized by absorption, dedication and vigour and dependent upon the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability". Macey and Schneider (2008) opine that engagement is a set of constructs that integrates state engagement (passion, energy, enthusiasm, and activation), behavioural engagement (adaptive behaviour) and trait engagement (personality attributes). Thus, organisations must promote a sense of trust that employees will benefit from the psychological and behavioural relationship with which they enter with the organisation. Saks (2006) found that there is a meaningful distinction between job and organisation engagement; that organisation engagement was a much stronger predictor of all the outcomes than job engagement. Creating a common framework helps employee to see a bigger picture in their daily work.

**Public Affairs/ Customer Relations:** Every institution top management team or governing bodies need to manage relationships and perceptions with their constituencies and stakeholders in order to build a reputable goodwill with its publics. Beyond just customer support, strong customer relations can go a long way toward building brand loyalty without relying on advertising or content alone. This involves how these institutions, organisations and companies tends to shape the perceptions and build relationships with their customer base. The relationship that is essential for the relevant publics is what Public Affairs seeks to address, knowing that the publics are essential for the existence of any institution or organisation.

**Community Relations:** Community relations programme helps organisation achieve visibility and good will of the community in which it operates. Institutions, Companies and nonprofits organisations often have a need to manage the connection they have with their surrounding communities. Organisations have the opportunity to improve good will and demonstrate a commitment to their

communities when they organize well-planned public relations campaigns; combined with appropriate actions and a variety of special programmes to improve community relations, that may include employee volunteers to work on community projects, sponsoring educational and literacy programmes, staging open houses and conducting plant tours, celebrating anniversaries, and mounting special exhibits.

**International/Global Public Relations:** As opined by Molleda (2009), international or global public relations is a strategic communications programmes and actions carried out by private, government, or nonprofit organizations to build and maintain relationships with publics in socioeconomic and political environments outside their home location or countries. For the Ivory Towers, it is aimed at maintaining the reputation of the institution as it can earn linkages for research resources and other collaborations as well as fellowships.

**Financial Relations:** This is a deliberate, planned and sustained relationship with financial institutions within the area of operations of an organisation in the quest for a good reputation that can enable the institution have financial activities with financial institutions. As corroborated by Shuaib (2020), financial public relations is yet to achieve a broad definition. But, financial public relations in simple investment terms can be considered as all communications activity is based around the simple fact that money only has real value as an investment and that investors are people. Even though this may sound a bit ambiguous, it made the point as institutions observe that the skill of financial public relations is focused on the need for publicly owned and listed companies to communicate with those that own them directly or indirectly through the media or city analysts. It seeks to have a good image so the publics can invest in organisations.

**Crisis Communications and Management:** Public relations practitioners become heavily involved in crisis communications whenever there is a major accident or natural disaster affecting an organisation and its community. Other types of crises involve bankruptcy, product failures, and management deficiencies. In some cases, crises call for an organisation to become involved in helping potential victims; in other cases, the crisis may require rebuilding an organisation's image. In any case, experts recommend that business owners prepare a plan in advance to deal with potential crises in an honest and forthright manner.

**Social media:** According to Bright network (2020), there are several companies using the social media campaign as a form of marketing, as it has a huge public relations potential. Many institutions' greatest public relations successes (and disasters) happen on social media. For the Ivory Towers and other organisations, the social media is a place where interactions with the organisations and the publics are visible to the whole world. The practitioners are making good use of the media with staff who are tech-savvy and intuitive with a functional website and facilities.

### 5.3 Goals of Public Relations

The main goal of public relations is to create, maintain, and protect the organisation's reputation, enhance its prestige, and present a favorable image before the general public. The purpose of public relations practice is to establish a two-way communication; resolve conflicts of interest by seeking common ground or areas of mutual interest, and to establish understanding based on truth, knowledge and full information. The scale of activity to promote good public relations may vary considerably according to the size and nature of interest of parties - (Nikhila, 2020). Public relations have definite impact on sales and revenue of any company; and can be an effective part of a company's overall marketing strategy.

The public relations practice is geared towards educating certain audiences about activities relevant to the organisation including the business in general, new legislation, and the use of particular products as well as measure for overcoming misconceptions and prejudices. It aims to establish contact with three important sections of the public: its customers, its stockholders and its employees, for securing the mutual understanding and co-operation of these three groups is essential to success. Also, it aims to promote the institution's services and products in a highly competitive society - (ibid, 2020).

Public Relations strategies are ethically committed to truthful and verifiable information. So, there is a premium on finding out the facts, getting the right data and information together on clients, events and issues. This contributes to the better understanding of clients' needs and enables the consideration of the right responses to problems and the construction of appropriate messages. According to Wynne, (2016, p.2)

PR is the Persuasion Business. You are trying to convince an audience, inside your building or town, and outside your usual sphere of influence, to

promote your idea, purchase your product, support your position, or recognize your accomplishments. Here's what the Public Relations Society of America PRSA agreed upon after a few thousand submissions: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics.

### 5.4 Steps in a Public Relations Campaign

Effective public relations require a knowledge, based on analysis and understanding of all the factors that influence public attitudes toward the organisation. While a specific public relations project or campaign may be undertaken proactively or reactively (to manage some sort of image crisis), the basic step in either case involves analysis and research to identify all the relevant factors of the situation.

Rosenfeld (2014) presents effective steps that will ensure success in a Public Relations campaign which the researchers admit can ensure a reputation for the tertiary institutions. According to her, the first step is the Objective. It is essential that you define and write out your objectives for the public relations campaign or marketing plan. This will allow for the determination of how the design for the campaign will be, and the components that will make it successful (Rosenfeld, 2014). The objectives could be creating and reinforcing the brands' image, informing potential customers and stakeholders of the services the organisation has to offer, or effective strategies the organisation can boast of, say e-learning facilities as in the case of the tertiary institution. The objective may be to generate more sales or admissions in the case of tertiary institutions, or even to get rid of negative publicity associated with the company or institution. Whatever the objectives are, it is important that they are clear and achievable.

The second step is Goal Setting. Goals assist in achieving the objectives that were set at the beginning. In order for goals to be successful they need to be S.M.A.R.T: meaning that the goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time- bound. The goals set out for a campaign should align with the overall mission, vision and sales objectives of the client or institution.

The third step is identifying the Target Audience for the campaign. The key to any public relations campaign or marketing plan is to clearly define who the target audience of the business or organisation is. This consists of determining who the institution or business or company wants the campaign to reach,

and what key messages is to be delivered to them. When defining the target audience, it is best to be as specific as possible, such as working out their gender, age, location and likes/dislikes – (Rosenfeld, 2014).

The fourth step is to Create a Timeline. Creating a timeline for the public relations campaign or marketing plan allows the campaign team to determine when each stage of the campaign will be completed and how long each stage should take to complete. A timeline also gives the client an idea of what to expect and how the campaign will be carried out. The timeline should also link with other marketing, business or sales efforts that are being carried out by the client at the time of the campaign.

The fifth step presents the Plan of Action. This includes developing and understanding the communication vehicles that the campaign will use to send the key messages to the target audience. Depending on the audience and their locations, delivering these key messages can be achieved through press releases, press conferences, interviews, newspapers or magazines editorial articles, customer (graduates’) testimonials, television, radio, press interviews, and events like convocation ceremony, exhibitions, inaugural lectures, etc. It is a good idea to select more than one communication vehicle in order to appeal to a wider audience.

The final step is the campaign. Once everything is in place, the campaign is set to begin. The results of the campaign should be tracked constantly to see whether goals and objectives are being achieved and to determine whether the target audience are receiving the key messages of the campaign.

At the completion of the campaign, the team should communicate with the client and determine whether the desired results have been achieved. This will also allow for determining whether the campaign was a success or not. Evaluating the results will also provide an indication for further campaign ideas and will allow the team to consider whether the original plan needs to be modified in any way – (Rosenfeld, 2014).

### 5.5 Tools/Strategies of Public Relations Activities

Commonly used tools of public relations include news releases, press conferences, speaking engagements, community service programmes, house journals, manuals, hand-books, advertising, display and exhibitions, motion pictures and slides, meetings, conducted tours, posters, brochures, play-cards, stickers, outdoor signs, etc. These are veritable tools

through which units of the Ivory Tower or individuals may disseminate information to the public (Nikhila, 2020). The key tools used by the universities among others are:

**Press Releases:** This is one public relations tool useful in every situation to manage the image or reputation of an organisation. It is a cost-effective outreach tool that is worth keeping in mind, considering accurate placements in news publications, blogs, websites, and magazines which aims to increase awareness of the brand.

**Brochures:** This is a print collateral that still has tons of value. If the tertiary institution has a physical presence, leaving people with information they can consume from time to time is a useful way of ensuring they are abreast with the latest service, products and the impact of the goodwill as institution or organisation has established.

**Press Conferences:** As Olariu and Bogdan (2015, p.1) affirms, “a press conference is an important tool of public relations. The primary role of public relations is to manage a company’s reputation and help build public consent for its enterprises. The goal of PR is to develop and maintain goodwill with most, if not all, of its publics. Failure to do so may mean loss of customers and revenues, time lost dealing with complaints or lawsuits, and loss of esteem. A company’s publics change constantly”. Press conferences thus give the Public relations unit the opportunity to have the management of organisations interact with the publics via the media.

### 6. Sex-for-grade or sex scandal

This phenomenon has existed unreported and has negatively impacted on the mental fabric of young scholars in the tertiary institutions thereby subjecting a lot to low perceptive labour. According to Joseph, (2015) Educational institutions are no longer the ivory towers of the past, but have become arenas for sexual victimization. He maintained that sexual harassment surfaced in primary schools, colleges and universities in the early 1980s, and the frequency of complaints have increased over the years.” Adamolekun (as cited in Egbegi, Benjamin and Onyejuba 2019) sees sexual assault in Nigerian university system to be under-researched and even less reported.

It is a ploy by few female students to acquire grades and certificates that are not commensurate to their impartation and knowledge. According to Sharma (as cited in Joseph, 2015, p.7) “sexual harassment in

education includes: (1) inappropriate sexualized comments or gestures; (2) unwanted physical contact such as touching, pinching or groping through to threats of exam failure; or (3) sexual assault and rape. Sexual harassment, also include sexual favors in exchange for good grades or preferential treatment in class. The perpetrators can be students, lecturers, teachers or administrative staff’.

A handful of loosed lecturers explore avenues to take advantage of some of the female young scholars who are courageous in their academics but look appealing in whatever sense to these loose lecturers, and because these female students resist the lecturers’ signals, they are made to feel threatened or become victimized. The lecturers have a thousand and one way to achieve the ugly phenomenon. The effect of this unwholesome behaviour has negatively affected the lecturers and students respectively. Aluedo, (as cited in Egbegi, Benjamin and Onyejuba, 2019) affirms that the effects of this assault on victims are so severe to the extent that they lead to the lack of concentration on academic activities leading to, truancy, unwanted pregnancy, decreased functionality and participation in group activities. This immoral act may make the future of the victim looks grim, ominous and unsafe.

## 7. Review of Studies

Egbegi, Benjamin, and Onyejebu (2019) did a study on ‘Eradicating Sexual Assault in Nigerian University System: The Role of Investigative Journalism’. The study considered the implications and appropriate measures to control sexual assault in our university system are highly speculative. This is because most literature was based on intuitive narrations. To these scholars, robust study on the use of investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university education is certainly lacking. The study analysed the need to adopt investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university system. The theoretical framework was development media theory.

The data for the study were secondarily sourced through newspaper publications, journal articles, text books, magazines and publications. The study recommends the need for university administrators to strengthen and continuously support investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault and other social vices in our university system. Also, university administrators should make the elimination of sexual assault a top priority by empowering lecturers to take a stand against inappropriate name-calling and sexual comments.

Joseph (2015) did a study on ‘Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions: A Comparative Perspective’. The study affirms that sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon in tertiary institutions. It has been receiving considerable attention in research and the media and public awareness has increased dramatically. The study specifically focuses on the definition of sexual harassment, incidence of sexual harassment of students in tertiary institutions, effects of sexual harassment on victims; and victims’ responses to sexual harassment. The study also offered suggestions for curtailing sexual harassment in these institutions.

Fadipe, and Bakenne (2020) studied the ‘BBC Sex-for-Grades-Report: Nigeria Tertiary Institutions ‘Crisis Management Strategies and Stakeholders’ Reactions’. The study examined the crisis management strategies of Nigerian tertiary institutions and stakeholders’ reactions after the British Broadcasting Corporation’s sex-for-grades report. Adopting qualitative research, the study analysed 13 available press releases of institutions retrieved from some institutions’ websites and sampled opinions of 20 stakeholders comprising parents, students and lecturers through a depth interview. The study used the Coombs’ theory of crisis response strategies: denial, diminish, rebuild and bolstering as thematic categories.

The study discovered that the institutions mostly used denial with diminish response strategy to blame societal decadence, scapegoat female students for and downplayed the severity of sexual harassment incidence by the institutions. More so, all the stakeholders distrust the credibility of local media in the reportage of sexual harassment cases. However, female students feel aggrieved that school administrations and national government neglected them for failing to outlaw sexual harassment and severely punish offenders. The study recommends that considering stakeholders’ perception of sexual harassment incidence in Nigerian ivory tower, Nigerian higher educational institutions should not adopt denial response strategy for sex scandal cases.

## 8. Research Design

This study adopted the qualitative research approach to analyse the Public relations approach used in Nigerian higher institutions of learning to attend to the problem of Sex-for-Grade. The responses of the Public Relations Heads of the Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos that had in recent times been involved in this act, were purposively chosen as the data for the study. Publications derived



from Press releases on the reports of the two universities made available to the public, were also used as secondary data for the study. Specifically, the researchers applied the qualitative content analytical tool to analyse the publications of these universities on the said incidents; the elements for the coding were proactive, reactive, denial of the incident,

accepting the incident, discipline of defaulters, university stand on the act. The elements were scored using a scale 5 to 1. 5 being the highest positive score, and one (1) being the lowest negative score. The results of the interviews were also used as data for the study.

**9. Research Findings**

The researchers purposively selected eight press releases and an editorial published on the media and analysed them for the study. The reports were:

**Table 1:** Publications on the sex-for-grade scandal and the rating using the coding elements.

S/No	Publication	Proactive	Reactive	Denied	Accepted	Disciplined	Against the Act
1	OAU Sex-for-marks scandals: investigation panel submits report; published on Premium times news on January 29, 2020.	1	5	1	5	5	5
2.	Sex-for-marks scandal: OAU indicts professor, suspends him indefinitely published on the guardian of April 29, 2018.	1	5	1	5	5	5
3	OAU dismisses professor involved in sex-for-marks scandal published on the guardian on June 20, 2018.	1`	5	1	5	5	5
4	OAU student accuses another lecturer of sexual harassment published on Pulse news on January 15, 2020.	1	5	1	5	5	5
5	Sex-for-grades scandal: UNILAG shuts down so-called "Cold Room" published on TVC News of Nigeria.	5	5	1	5	5	5
6	Sex-for-grades scandal: Vice Chancellor announces sack of lecturer published on the guardian of October 8, 2019.	1	5	1	5	5	5
7	UNILAG suspends lecturer indefinitely published on the guardian news of October 7, 2019.	1	5	1	5	5	5
8	Sex-for-grades: No more cold room as UNILAG shuts location published on the vanguard of October 8, 2019.	5	5	1	5	5	5
9	The punch news editorial on the sex-for-grades scandal as degrading the university system published on October 11, 2019.	1	5	1	5	5	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>

From all the publications the researchers found out that most of the information and decisions from the Universities were reactionary to the incidences and were never presented to deny or cover up the incidents. In fact, the disciplines for the act were meted out to establish that the universities overlook the unwholesome act. Thus, the universities stand is that they do not condone the sex-for-grade practice and were willing to allow the culprits face the consequences of their actions.

The responses of the interviews on the public relations heads is as follows:

Both the Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos have functional public relations Units that carry out activities aimed at building and maintaining the image and reputation of the universities. In fact, most of the tools of public relations presented were used by the universities to relate to all the inter-related parts of the environment to ensure mutual understanding.

Proactive measures for ensuring the good image of the universities were utilized for both the students and the staff. For the students, during Orientation for newly admitted students and Students' week, talks, seminars, etc. are presented by the universities as measures to ensure the students ascertain that they are ambassadors of the Institutions. Also, anti-rape, anti-cultism, sexual sanity, mode of dressing, anti-examination malpractice campaigns were carried out each session to ensure that the students are aware of the universities' policy against such vices. For the staff, orientation takes place during the probation period with talks on conduct as well as image building thus persuading staff to do all within their power to build the image of the universities to promote standard.

Part of the Code of Conduct for the staff was that they must not allow any act that does not invalidate their person, and that specifically; sexual harassment is not tolerated in the universities.

Situations where students come out to report the incidents, the universities take actions against the culprits, and particularly for the Obafemi Awolowo University, the Centre for Gender Studies is also empowered to handle cases of students who may not be bold to stand before panels, thus they gather all the facts and make a case against the offenders.

Disciplinary measures are always taken to show that the universities do not tolerate sex-for-grade scandals. Thus, after the incident was reported and even before the investigations were concluded, the universities issued press releases, memos and circulars to present the stand of the universities.

### 10. Discussion of Finding

Based on the findings from the study, it is obvious that there exist public relations units in the Obafemi Awolowo University and Lagos University, although they are not full departments. Jackson (2001) contributing to what public relations should be seen, opines that, all professions exists by public consent only. And that public relations provides an overriding social benefit when people have a voice leading to harmony as the outcome of the public relations practiced over a long time. Universities desire harmonious relationships, not just relations, fortified with trust from all the inter-related parts. Thus, managements should know that their communication role is to transmit not only information but also emotions and intuition aims at changing the behaviour of all parts of the system. The public relations units must serve as a catalyst for this.

Also, the public relations units carry out several activities that are aimed at ensuring a good image for the universities and maintaining the reputation of the universities. But, most of the activities that should be carried out proactively are not done because the units are not departments besides the Heads not being part of the universities decision-making body. This accounts for the low proactive activities as seen on the table. Public relations as approved by the World Assembly of Public Relations (2019) see the practice as the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organisation leaders and implementing planned programme of action that serve both the organisation and the publics' interest.

On the sex-for-grades scandal, the data shown affirms that the universities as a place of learning where graduates are raised and awarded certificates for character and learning, the unwholesome practice is not welcomed. Juxtaposing this with the study by Egbeji, Benjamin and Onyejebu (2019) on

'Eradicating Sexual Assault in Nigerian University System: The role of Investigative Journalism'. The study affirms that although there are the implications and appropriate measures to control sexual assault in the university system which according to their study, are highly speculative, the appropriate public relations strategies properly executed, can curb or completely eradicate the sex-for-grades practice. Thus, added to the need to adopt investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university system, public relations fully practiced, can eliminate this unwholesome practice.

Joseph, (2015) affirms that sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon in tertiary institutions. It has been receiving considerable attention in research and the media and public awareness has increased dramatically. In a study specifically focused on the definition of sexual harassment, incidence of sexual harassment of students in tertiary institutions, effects of sexual harassment on victims; and victims' responses to sexual harassment. Joseph (2015) offered suggestions for curtailing sexual harassment in institutions, some of which are public relations activities. Fadipe and Adesola (2020) studied the 'BBC Sex-for-Grades-Report: Nigeria Tertiary Institutions 'Crisis Management Strategies and Stakeholders' Reactions'. The study examined the crisis management strategies of Nigerian tertiary institutions and stakeholders' reactions after the British Broadcasting Corporation's sex-for-grades report; and discovered that the institutions mostly used denial with diminish response strategy to blame societal decadence, scapegoat female students for and downplayed the severity of sexual harassment incidence by the institutions. More so, all the stakeholders distrust the credibility of local media in the reportage of sexual harassment cases.

However, female students feel aggrieved that school administrations and national government neglected them for failing to outlaw sexual harassment and severely punish offenders. At the moment, the government of Nigeria via the National Assembly is working on a bill aimed at eliminating sex-for-grades in the tertiary institutions. Also, several ivory towers have come up with Sexual Harassment Policy statements (for example, University of Port Harcourt). So, the findings give the researchers the view that if all tertiary institutions can employ all the avenues of public relations, the end is sure for this image-destroying practice that is unacceptable and abominable to all known religions.

## 11. Conclusion

The survival of any institution depends to an extent, the ability of its members to perform or act within the limits of the accepted behaviour. The tertiary institutions have become increasingly fearful and unsecured following the deviant behaviour exhibited by some lecturers and students at various levels. One of the primary duties which heads of institutions owe its publics and relevant stakeholders is to provide adequate information so that its policies and programmes would be clearly defined and understood at all times by those on whose behalf it acts. The action of an individual or employee can influence someone or cause something that can destroy the reputation of the citadels of learning. The public relations department of our tertiary institutions should be proactive and plan programmes that geared towards eradicating the anomalies through an advocacy for socially acceptable attitudes, values and culture that will project individual pride and positive image.

## 12. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the study recommends the followings:

- University authorities should restructure its organogramme to accord the public relations a full-fledged Department. The restructuring will enable the public relation manager participate in the decision making body of the institution;
- Stiffer punishment/penalties should be meted to the “randy” staff of the institutions. This will discourage both staff and students from indulging in the ugly and ungodly act.
- A live-line channel should be established by the institutions. This live-line should be domicile within the purview of the vice-chancellor where students can relate with the authorities in an attempt to expose illicit practices by the lecturers, etc.
- Proactive measures should be taken even in the most peaceful atmosphere to ensure that the stakeholders build trust in the integrity of the ivory towers. This will ensure that all the inter-related parties to the successful goals of the institutions; do all that is required of them to attain heights acceptable as well as lofty for the society.
- Vigorous public relations campaigns should be mounted by the universities to ensure that the staff and students shun various vices inimical to development in other to make

ivory tower a better place of academic pursuits and gain public confidence.

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