

Digital Public Relations, Artificial Intelligence Adoption, and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was embarked on to assess the potentials and impact of digitization of public relations (PR) and adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools on promoting sustainable social and economic development in the South-East region of Nigeria. With the aim of establishing the level of awareness and prevalence of digital technology in PR practices, as well as the militating factors against adoption, the study generated primary data from a sample of 384 respondents. The respondents selected from the five states of South-East region were selected using multi-staged sampling techniques. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to achieve the objectives and answer the four research questions. Results from the use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics of logistic regression shows that digitization of public relations practices and usage of AI tools have made significant impact on promoting sustainable development of the region. The odd ratio that quantifies the relationship between digital PR and economic development at 5% significance level is about 9.5 times higher, and that of social developments, about 12.3 times higher. This simply implies that unit increase in digital PR efforts will create about 10 times, and 12 times more possibilities for promotion of economic and social development respectively in the region. The study hence, concluded that digitization of PR and usage of AI tools have high capacity to promote sustainable development if the professionals are well-equipped to key into all the necessary demands to overcome the obstacles. Therefore, the study recommended that leading the future of PR requires deliberate and concerted investment in AI literacy, making wise choice of tools as well as continuous monitoring of ethical practice.

Keywords: Public Relations, Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Development, Economy, Digital PR, Nigeria.

Introduction

The global shift toward digital technologies have significantly impacted the practice of public relations, especially in developing economies like Nigeria (Nwachukwu, 2023; Ayodele & Oparah, 2024). Public relations, traditionally reliant on interpersonal and media relations, is now experiencing a paradigm shift as digitalization, Artificial Intelligence (AI), transforms the way messages are crafted, disseminated, and evaluated (Ezechukeu & Ifediora, 2022). Public relations (PR) digitization researches in the recent years have witnessed considerably serious debate that has had scholars coming up with strong emphasis on the current and upcoming technological innovations as it concerns media (Gartner Glossary, 2023; Peterson, 2023), the requisite professional skills of the PR professionals (Nwanmuoh et al, 2024), as well as tested managerial conceptions (Chinbuwe & Ngozwana, 2021). This debate has sincerely open up PR research as an adaptive response to the latest digital advancements in information and communication technology (Bowen et al, 2019).

The digitalization of public relations entails assimilating digital technologies into PR practices to flow with the current realities in management of the online presence of brands, brand reputations as well as their relationships with the general public (Ezechukeu & Ifediora, 2022). Most times as noted by scholars, digitization of PR concentrates more on building online authority and trust (Nyitse & Agbeke 2023), creating real-time, data-driven content (Okolo-Obasi et al, 2024), and engaging with audiences across various digital channels (Adegbite, 2023). Hence, scholars like, Ayodele and Oparah (2024), noted that four major key aspects of digital public relations occasions; Data-driven strategy, online reputation management, relationship building and Content creation. While Triumph-Aruchi et al (2023) opines that *data-driven strategy* involves professionals using data and analytics in creating, optimizing and measuring the efficacy of their communication strategies; Paul et al (2022), noted that *online reputation management* entails using digital platforms in shaping images of firms, managing their reputation, and responding to crises real-time. Also, Global Alliance. (2021) averred that *relationship building* involves using influencers and customers to build and maintain relationships with the general public with the help of digital channels; and *Content creation* encompass personalizing digital content for diversity of platforms.

Currently the PR practitioners have advanced into using artificial intelligence (AI) which is the blending of technologies like machine learning and natural language processing to automate public relation tasks and enhance strategy (Onaleye, 2023). To Onyema (2019), the practitioners are aided by AI in systematizing monotonous tasks, scrutinizing bulky data for understandings, generating custom-made content, and monitoring media for brand mentions and sentiment. Russell and Norvig (2020), opines that the usage of AI in public relations tasks grants the practitioners leave to concentrate mainly on strategic graft to build healthier communication with the public and main stakeholders.

Hence, to Ajibade and Salami (2023), Udomah et al (2023), AI helps in content creation, data analysis, automation personalization, and crisis management as its tools has the ability to

monitor budding issues in real-time. To Eze and Chukwu (2024), such monitoring allows public relations teams to classify and react to disasters quicker.

Digitalization has redefined the communication landscape in Nigeria, enabling public relations practitioner to harness the power of online platforms, real-time analytics, and automated systems to build stakeholder trust and transparency. Artificial Intelligence technologies such as natural language processing, machine learning, and chatbots are increasingly integrated into communication strategies to predict public sentiment, personalize campaigns, and manage crisis effectively (Chibue & Ngoywana, 2021). These innovations enhance decision making efficiency, audience targeting, and feedback analysis – fostering economic development through more inclusive and participatory engagement processes.

The Nigeria's South – East region is characterized by its dynamic socio-economic landscape and growing entrepreneurial ecosystem which presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable development (Eze & Chukwu, 2024). To Ezechukwu and Ifediora (2022), sustainable development which the United Nations defined as development that meets present needs without compromising the future, relies heavily on informed decision-making, transparency, and accountability, these pillars are directly supported by digital public relations tools and Artificial Intelligence, power systems. In the South-Eastern Nigeria, technological adoption is fast evolving, and the technology tools have become crucial for amplifying voices in rural communities, promoting social entrepreneurship, and driving awareness on environmental and governance issues (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022; Uduji et al 2023). It has therefore become very expedient that harnessing the various tools for social and economic development is a top priority. Hence, the focus of this current study is an attempt to examine how best to leverage on digitalization of public relations and usage of AI tools public relations to effectively foster sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria, with a specific emphasis on the South-East region.

Study Problem

Despite the growing global emphasis on digital transformation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as key drivers of sustainable development, public relation professional in Nigeria - particularly in the South-East region-continues to face significant challenges in harnessing these technologies. While advanced economies have rapidly integrated digital tools and AI system for predictive analytics, sentiment monitoring, and stakeholder mapping to enhance public relations management, improve transparency, and promote inclusive growth (UNESCO, 2021; KPMG, 2023), Nigeria, including the highly internet penetrated South-East is still largely crawling behind, grasping traditional and almost outdated communication strategies (Eze, 2022). Identified as key barriers to digital PR in the region include poor ICT infrastructure, low digital literacy among practitioners, inadequate training, resistance to technological change, and absence of strong regulatory frameworks (Okafor, 2021).

This gap in digital PR adoption appears to have limited the capacity of public relations professionals in contributing meaningfully to socio-economic development of the region. This is owing to the fact that, Ajibade and Salami (2023) noted that, the underutilization of AI-driven public engagement tools and digital platforms weakens the effectiveness of public relations campaigns aimed at supporting sustainable development goals (SDGs). The level of assimilation of digital PR in the region seems to have created rooms for poor policy communication, low public awareness of government programmes, and inefficient feedback mechanisms-issues that ultimately hinder sustainable development. Furthermore, lack of localized research and implementation strategies for integrating digital tools and AI in public relations practice appears to be compounding the problem. These challenges are needed to be quickly addressed with lasting solutions to enable the region align properly in the evolving digital economy to be able to widen regional development and quicken Nigeria's progress towards the 2030 SDG targets. The study, therefore, seeks to explore the intersection between digitalization of public relations, Artificial Intelligence integration, and sustainable socio-economic development of South-East region of Nigeria.

Study Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of public relations digitalization and Artificial Intelligence in promoting sustainable socio-economic development of Nigeria, with emphasis on South-East region of Nigeria.

The specific objectives include to:

1. Ascertain the prevalence level of PR digitization and AI application in South-East region
2. Determine the effect of digitization of public relations and usage of AI in promoting sustainable economic development of South East region.
3. Determine the effect of digitization of public relations and usage of AI in promoting sustainable social development of South East region.
4. Determine the factors militating against digitalization of public relations and usage of AI in South-East region.

Hypotheses Development

The adoption and usage of digital PR tools, migration to artificial intelligent in the fast-evolving digital PR world has reasonably brought and is still bringing significant transformations as well as exciting opportunities (Ntuk et al, 2022). Seamlessly, industries are assimilating and both PR, marketing and advertising are integration and fashioning a all-inclusive approach to communications. This approach around the globe is aiding reliable brand messaging, and high level of online visibility. The PR landscape significantly has been transformed by the artificial intelligence, social media, influencer relations and research-based insights. These variables are swiftly leading to the PR industry to exceptional growth.

Hence, because, scholars believe that digitalization has drastically shaped public relations in the past decade (Nwankwo & Ogbonna, 2022) through the increasing importance of the various internet-based platforms, the future holds many promises for the PR industry. However, how Nigeria as a whole and the South-East region in particular are gearing up toward the challenges ahead remains unclear. To Orji-Egwu et al (2019) Okafor et al (2021), Uche & Obi (2023). PR professionals will have to stay ahead of new trends, embrace cutting-edge technologies, and constantly adapt to digital strategies in a bid to cater to the needs of brands in the dynamic digital landscape. Without this clarity of purposes clearly defined, we therefore hypothesized in this study that:

1. digitization of public relations and usage of AI has not significantly promoted sustainable economic development of South East region.
2. digitization of public relations and usage of AI has not significantly promoted sustainable social development of South East region
3. there are no significant known factors militating against digitalization of public relations and usage of AI in South-East region.

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Review of Related Literature

The connection of public relations digitalization and Artificial Intelligence in promoting sustainable development represents a serious area of research in Nigeria's developing economic landscape. Here, we looked at the literature in view of past and current issues on how digitization of public relations practices as well as adoption and usage of Artificial Intelligence technologies have shaped and continues to shape PR with regard to both social and economic development in sustainable way, particularly in the South-East region of Nigeria.

Concept of Public Relations

Public relations, a term traditionally defined as the strategic management of communication between an organization and its publics to build mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) is as old as communication itself. To Nwanmuoh et al (2024), the concept of PR is a combination of two concepts which are *Public* (the people to whom communication is meant to reach) and *Relations* (connection through communication). To Prnewsonline.com (2017), Nyitse and Agbeke (2023), public relations is seen as a management function charged with evaluation of public attitudes, identifying the policies and procedures of an entity with the public interest and plans and executing program of actions to earn public understanding and patience. In the lens of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (2010), PR is an endeavour which monitors entities' reputation with the intentions of earning public and stakeholder understanding and support as well as influencing opinion and behavior.

In today's digital era, public relations have evolved beyond media relations to include digital storytelling, content creation, social media engagement, and online reputation management (Nwankwo & Ogbonna, 2022). According to Okoro and Agbo (2023), digital public relations in Nigeria is becoming a powerful tool for corporate sustainability communication, as organizations increasingly rely on online platforms to communicate their environment, social and governance (ESG) initiatives. Public relations can be viewed as the conscience of any organization, government or community nurtured by mutual understanding and factual communication aimed at eliminating negative attitude in order to achieve desired objective (Nwanmuoh et al, 2021). Adeyemi et al (2023) provide critical insights into public relations transformation, noting that "digital media and its ancillary technologies have transformed public relations practice in Nigeria today" (Adeyemi et al, 2023). This transformation extends beyond mere technological adoption to encompass fundamental changes in how organizations engage with stakeholders and manage their public image.

Concept of Digitalization

According to Udomah, Akarika & Kieran (2023), the term digitalization has been frequently used in public discourse in recent years, with many variants of the term used, and in many cases, misused or misleading. It is the use of digital technologies in altering business models and providing both extra revenue centres and additional, a process of moving to a digital business (Gartner Glossary 2023). The term digitalization, according to Brennen & Kreiss (2016), Oso and Akanmi (2017), simply targets implementation of information and communication technology-based interactions, its impact and consequences on the society in the area of economy, politics, culture, and social affairs. Brennen and Kreiss (2016) added that digitalization refers to the adoption and integration of digital technologies to transform business models, enhance efficiency, and improve value creation. The technology that drives digitization is, digital technologies which are electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store or process data (Necmiye & Fahri, 2017). Well-known examples include social media, online games multimedia and mobile phones (Emmanuel, 2021).

To Akpan et al (2022), Okolo-Obasi et al (2025b), all spheres of human endeavours including public relations practices have witnessed remarkable innovations as a result of the introduction of digital technology. Nwafor (2010), asserted that in PR, the coming of satellite has revolutionized the practice in that news have become most instantaneous and simultaneous, especially for broadcast. To Akarika et al (2022), Nwanmuoh et al (2024b), their studies added that digitization and digital technologies have lessen the job burden of PR practitioners and increased their efficacy.

In the Nigeria context, digitalization is being driven by mobile technology, fintech, e-governance platforms, and digital communication channels. Uche and Obi (2023) observe that digitalization has significantly reshaped the Nigeria public relations industry, enabling real-time stakeholder engagement and proactive issue management. Moreover,

digitalization is a critical enabler for sustainability, as it promotes transparency, reduces resources waste, and improves operational accountability.

Concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

According to Rodsevich (2025), artificial intelligence (AI) simply means machines that can perceive intelligence, synthesize and infer information. X Russell and Norvig (2020) added that AI is the science and engineering of intelligent machines that can mimic human intelligence to perform tasks and then, on the information they collect, improve themselves. To Ayodele and Opara (2024), the design of AI is to significantly enhance human capabilities and contributions, making it a valuable business asset. Awofadeju et al (2020), and Suleiman et al (2020), added that in the developed world and many developing nations, AI has intercepted many different areas of our lives including, and public relations. To Rodsevich (2025), AI has come on leaps and bounds in recent years and the African nations including Nigeria are only just beginning to tap into its uses in the business world. Nyitse and Agbeke (2023), Okoro and Agbo (2023), noted that in many places, applied artificial intelligence has been deployed for marketing campaigns, customer service responses, strategic planning, and many other functions in business.

The face of the Public Relations industry is rapidly and vastly changing as public relations professionals are increasingly embracing AI-powered tools and techniques in both strategy and operations for better and more effective results (Rodsevich, 2025). To Uduji et al (2024), Okolo-Obasi et al (2025c), AI is changing industries globally, with rates of adoption skyrocketing in recent years.

In Nigeria, Ayodele and Opara (2024), avers that AI-powered tools have enabled Nigerian organizations to enhance the personalization of communication, streamline public relations processes, and measure impact more efficiently. The role of AI in supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is also gaining traction, especially in areas like education, healthcare, and environmental protection.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Development in Nigeria requires integrated planning, accountability, and the inclusion of technological innovations like Artificial Intelligence and digital tools in public policy and governance. It encompasses economic growth, developmental protection, and social inclusion. In Nigeria, challenges such as poverty, pollution, and governance inefficiencies hinder sustainability development. However, Okonkwo and Eze (2022) argue that the integration of digital technologies in governance and corporate operations can accelerate progress towards achieving (SDGs), especially when supported by effective PR strategies and data-driven decision-making enabled by AI.

Sustainable development is guided by global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which outline 17 interconnected goals aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity, for all. In Southeastern

Nigeria sustainable development efforts are influenced by both local policy and external investments, with a focus on education, health care, clean energy, and infrastructure development (Eneh, 2011).

Sustainable Development is an approach to economic growth that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Suleiman, Yahya, & Tukur, 2020). It involves balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations to ensure that development is environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable over the long term (Yli-Huumo, et al, 2016).

Conceptual Overview

According to scholars like Osanyintuyi (2018), Thompson (2018), Wang et al., 2021, digitalization has molded public relations for the last two decades, adoption and usage of AI has increasingly affected PR through the increasing importance of websites, blogs, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, among others in many aspects of our lives (Ayodele & Opara, 2024).

Globally, PR Digitalization and adoption of AI tools according to Necmiye and Fahri (2017) has made some serious impact in enabling efficiency crisis management, real-time communication, and data-driven strategies that are in conformity with sustainability goals. The use of AI tools like chatbots and sentiment analysis to automated reporting and predictive analytics have serious aided smarter decision-making processes (Eze & Chukwu, 2024).

Public relations as a huge industry have numerous opportunities awaiting those who desires to participates in the profession of public relations. According to Orji-Egwu et al (2019). Opportunities in PR can increase more in Nigeria and South-East in particular if digitization and AI are fully incorporated into it. The explosion of digital media in this digital age affords PR practitioners more opportunities than they were before and has more incensed capacity to necessitate actualization of sustainable social and economic development.

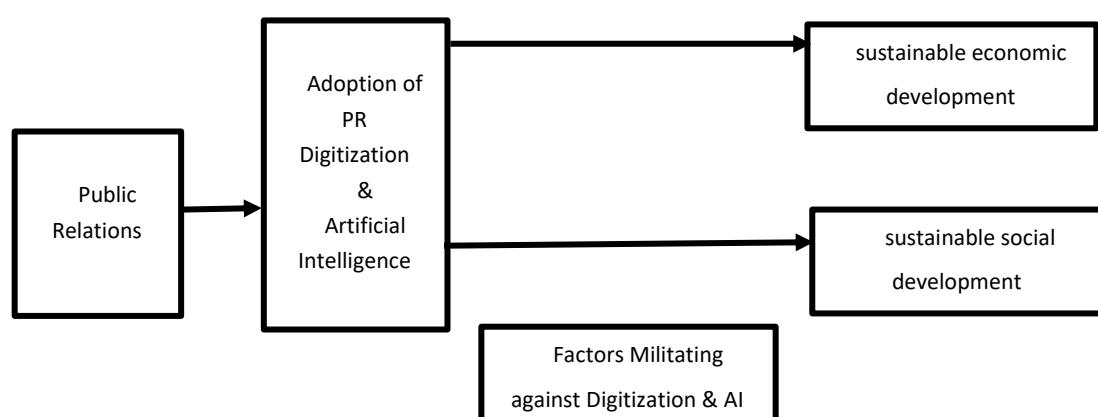


Fig. 1 Conceptual Model of PR digitalization and AI on Sustainable Development

Source: Authors Conceptual Model

Challenges of Digitization

Despite the evident potential, challenges persist. Issues such as digital illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, and ethical concerns about Artificial Intelligence-driven messaging raise questions about equity and access (Nwachukwu, 2003). Nonetheless, strategic investment in digital public relations and localized Artificial Intelligence solutions-tailored to the unique social-cultural contexts of the South-East could greatly enhance sustainable economic growth, foster innovation, and improve civic engagement. These technologies are redefining traditional communication patterns, particularly in sectors like government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and businesses, where sustainability and transparency are key performance indicators (Adegbite, 2023).

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on two major theories, the theory of innovation diffusion propounded by (Rogers, 1962). And the theory of profession propounded by (Larson, 1977). While theory of profession

infers those changes in society are drivers for the development of a profession; the theory of innovation diffusion explains how, why and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread through culture. The innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) is relevant for understanding how public relations digitalization and Artificial intelligence are adopted across organizations and what factors influence the rate of adoption. That of professional development where in this case, the changes in media have triggered digitalization and drives development in public relation profession leading to shifts in the working environment. To Eneh (2011), often times, specialization in working life and some form of proficiency become increasingly important. With the digitalization of PR and adoption of AI, there is bound to be needs for new sets of skills in response to areas like the use of social. This is to say that; professionalization of Public Relations will now play major role in towing the new part to confirm with the advancement in technology (Ikpe & Oliseh, 2010; Rosén, 2014; Uduji et al, 2019b).

This is where IDT plays a crucial role in as much as it explains the how, why and at what rate new ideas, digitization and AI technologies or innovations spread through Public relations practices over time. The key element of IDT can be explained as follows: Innovation refers to the idea, practice, or technology that is new to the users like artificial intelligence in public relations campaigns, digital sustainability dashboards. Time refers to the rate at which an innovation is adopted by individuals or organizations. Communication channels means by which information about the innovation is transmitted, eg social media, workshops and conferences.

Social system refers to the network of individuals, organizations, or institutions that interact and influence one another's adoption decisions. According to Rogers (2003), five characteristics of innovation influence their rate of adoption: Relative advantage refers to the degree which the innovation is perceived as better than what it replaces eg, AI-

enhanced PR is faster and more data-driven than traditional PR. Compatibility refers to how consistent the innovation is with the values, experiences and needs of the potential adopters. Complexity refers to the degree to which the innovation is perceived as difficult to understand or use. Trialability refers to the extent to which the innovation can be experimented with before full adoption. Observability refers to the results of the innovation to others.

Material and Methods

Area of Study



Figure 2: Map showing the constituent states of the South-East, Nigeria

Source: Adapted with modification from Nwanmuoh et al (2025a)

We conducted this research in the South-Eastern (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) part of Nigeria. With a 2022 National population commission's projected population of about 23,488,500 people, South-East has a high population density with total land mass of about 29525Km². (NBS 2023). See Figure 2 for the map of the region and the constituent states.

Research Design

We adopted a descriptive research design in the study in that we targeted to describe the influence of digitized public relations and adoption of artificial intelligence on social and economic growth of south-east Nigeria. Descriptive research design was considered suitable because the study only explains the level and nature of interaction between the variables. The design interprets what digitization and adoption of AI in public relations have achieved, the inbuilt potential, opportunities and threats around the new technologies.

Population of the Study

The population targeted for this study is the total number of public relation practitioners in both government, non-governmental and private organization in the region.

Sample Size

Sample for the survey was computed using Cochran sample size determination formula mathematically stated as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1 - p)}{d^2}$$

Where, n = the sample size;

z is the standard normal deviation for a given level of confidence, (95% confidence = 1.96), d = is the margin of error at 0.05 for CI at 95%; p stands for proportion to be estimated. If the value of p is not known with certainty, p is always assumed to be 0.5.

Hence, we determined the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(1-0.5)}{0.05^2} = n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.$$

We use 0.5 for p in honour of the rule that where the value of p is not known with certainty, it shall have assumed to be 0.5.

Sampling Procedure

Multi-stage sampling method was adopted in sampling the PR professionals used as respondent for this study. Using quota in the first stage, we reorganized that the region has five states and each state must get at least 60 respondents depending on the total population of the state. This was used to enshrine equity in the sample representation. In the second stage from each of the state we selected three local government areas, one representing each of the senatorial zones of the states, hence a total of 15 Local governments was sampled. In the third stage, from each of the selected LGA, we purposefully selected the three most commercially advance communities or ward giving us 45 communities or wards to study. In the final stage, from each of the purposefully selected community or ward, we employed the services of gatekeeper like Nigeria Institute of public relations (NIPR) to randomly select PR professional based on the population assigned to the state. See sample size determination table.

Table 1: Sample Size Determination

State	Population	Percentage	Sample size
Abia	4,143,100	18	68
Anambra	5,953,500	25	97
Ebonyi	3,242,500	14	53
Enugu	4,690,100	20	77
Imo	5,459,300	23	89
Total	23,488,500	100	384

Source: Authors' Computation

While we acknowledged that the quota and purposive sampling system may have introduced a little element of biasness in the sampling, we equally noted that the wider coverage of opinion ranted using them is enough to offset the drawback.

Collection of Data

From the field, we gleaned both primary and secondary data used in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative primary data were collected using questionnaire and key informant interview instruments respectively. In as much as primary data was the main data used for the study, secondary data were also sourced to help in the validation of the result generated from the analysis of the primary data source. The method adopted in the data gathering was participatory appraisal technique towards ensuring that the right respondents' opinions were adequately captured.

Instrument Validity

Following the assertion of Kumar (2011), that validity remains the most critical criterion indicating that an instrument is able to measures what it is set out to measure; we properly structured the questionnaire instrument used for this study after the conduct of pre-test. The pre-test result gave us an insight to prove that all the necessary questions were asked and that every question in the instrument was valid and made vital contribution to answering the overall research question.

Instrument Reliability

This study also adapted a test-retest method to ensure the reliability of the instrument. Embarking on the test-retest, we administered 30 copies of the instrument on randomly selected respondent within Enugu and Ebonyi States. Result from the analysis of the data collected shows that the Cronbach's Alpha scales obtained from the variables were all above 70% which was adjudged that the scales is consistent and capable of guaranteeing that variables measured same construct and generates internal consistency.

Observation of Ethics

We acknowledged in this study that the footing of ethical research is 'informed consent'. This was why, we did not toy with informed consent in conducting the survey of the study. Every respondent who participated in the survey was fully informed of the purpose. All were pre-informed of the questions and how the data were expected to be utilized. We guaranteed them in a signed consent letter that there will be no negative implication after the study as the results will be used intact for the specified purpose. Anonymity was also guaranteed while the full identity of the researchers and their assistants were fully spell out. We did not in any way forced, coaxed or pressure any person into participating in the survey.

Methods of Data Analysis

We adopted mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative) in our analysis of data collected, collated, cleaned and coded. While we handled the qualitative data content analysis technique, the quantitative data were handled with the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Multiple regression analysis was estimated to test the research hypotheses.

Model Specification

The effect of digitization of public relations and adoption of AI on both social and economic development of the South-East region was tested using multiple regression equation. We outlined the predictors from the literature review and such predictors formed part of the elaborate model. We tested the variable in line the works of Nwanmuoh et al (2025a, 2025b). We adapted the model with modifications as it states the binominal response variables as a natural logarithm of the odds ratios thus:

$$\text{Logit (SED)} = \log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1...n} + \beta_2 Y_{1...n} + \mu \quad \text{Eqn 1}$$

Where;

β_0 Stands for the constant, $\beta_1 - \beta_4$ Stands for are unknown coefficients.

P_i Stand for the probability of digitization and usage of AI.

$X_{1...n}$ stands for socio – economic variables

$Y_{1...n}$ Stands for of environmental variables

μ Stands for the stochastic error term.

Applying this to the variables in the current study, the model has 8 independent variables that explain economic development as follows:

$$\text{Log (ED)} = \log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DAIPR + \alpha_2 Age + \alpha_3 Sex + \alpha_4 Edu + \alpha_5 Rel +$$

$$\alpha_6 Lotn + \alpha_7 Awe + \alpha_8 Trn + \mu \quad \text{Eqn 2}$$

Where ED is the dependent variable Economic development in the region.

And social development as follw:

$$\text{Log (SD)} = \log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DAIPR + \alpha_2 Age + \alpha_3 Sex + \alpha_4 Edu + \alpha_5 Rel + \alpha_6 Lotn +$$

$$\alpha_7 Awe + \alpha_8 Trn + \mu \quad \text{Eqn 3}$$

The independent or explanatory variables include:

Age = Age of the respondent (measured in number of years)

Sex = Gender of the respondent (dummy variable, Male = 1, Female = 0)

Edu =Level education of the respondent (measured by number of years spent School)

Rel = Region of the respondent (None = 0, ATR = 1, Muslim = 2 and Christian = 3).

Lotn = Location of the respondent (1 = Urban and 0 =Rural)

DAIPR = Digital PR and usage of Artificial Intelligence (the is measured with a dummy variable where yes = 1 and No =0)

Awe = Digitization and AI usage awareness

Trn = Level of digital training acquired by the respondents

μ = Stochastic error term.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Socio- economic Characteristics

Starting the analysis of this study, we looked at the description of some of the economic, social, and demographic characteristic of the respondents to decipher the differences so as to be able to make adequate claims.

Table 2: Socio - Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Freq	%	Cum
Sex of respondents			
Males	186	48	48
Females	198	52	100
	384	100	
Age of Respondents			
20-30 Years	159	41	41
31-40 Years	109	28	70
41-50 Years	83	22	91
51-60 Years	27	7	98
> 60 Years	7	2	100
	384	100	
Monthly Income			
1000 - 100,000	49	13	13
101,000 - 200,000	146	38	51
201,000 - 300,000	75	20	70
301,000 - 400,000	51	13	84
401,000 - 500,000	36	9	93
501,000 - 600,000	23	6	99
Above 600,000	5	1	100
	384	100	
Highest Educational Level			
None	5	1	1
Primary	19	5	6
Secondary	35	9	15
Tertiary (OND/NCE)	77	20	35
Tertiary (HND/BSC)	135	35	70
Tertiary (PGD)	66	17	87
Tertiary (MSc/MA)	38	10	97
Tertiary (PhD)	14	3	100
	384	100	
Religion			
None	30	8	8
ATR	42	11	19
Christians	291	76	95
Muslim	22	6	100
	384	100	

Source: Authors' computation

The analysis of (Table 2) points out that while 186 respondents, about 48% were males, about 52%, 198 respondents were females. This shows that the sample drawn from the population of PR practitioners adequately represent both genders. It also indicates that gone are the day that women were stereotyped to some particular trades. Also, the analysis pointed that bulk of the respondents are still young and in their very active and productive years as about 91% of them were still less than or equal to 50 years. With only about 2% of the respondents above 60 years of age, it shows that, the population is ripe and should be equipped to adopt and adapt new technologies easily. Looking and the level of educational qualification, we noted that while about 85% obtained tertiary education qualification, about 3% studied up to PhD. This simply confirmed the assertions of Nwanmuoh et al (2021), Uduji and Okolo-obasi (2023) Nwanmuoh et al (2024), though South-East may have some other challenges, but educational development is not major.

Likewise, the study indicated that while about 76% of the respondent were Christians, only 6% identified with Islam, 11% with African Traditional Religion, and 8% with none. This is an indication that the freedom of worship is high, confirming the reason behind many women practicing public relations. The result also shows that while only about 13% of the respondents earn N100,000 (\$67) or below per month, only about 1% earn more than N600,000 (\$400) in a month. In all, the average income of the respondents is about N235,000 (\$157). This is still an indication that most families of the respondents are still living below the poverty line. A closer look at this displays that the level of poverty in Nigeria is on the very high side owing that the region under study is often viewed as one if not the most economic viable on the average of citizens living in a region.

Prevalence Rate of Digitization of PR and Adoption of AI in Nigeria in South-East Nigeria

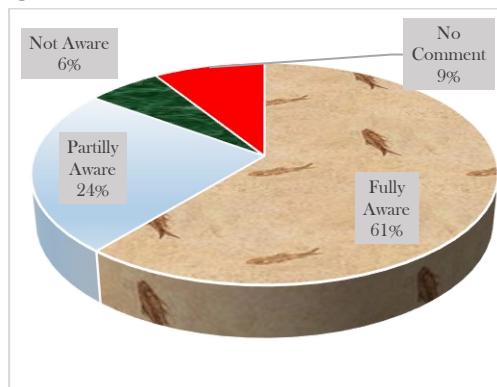


Fig. 3 Level of respondents' awareness

Source: Authors Compilation

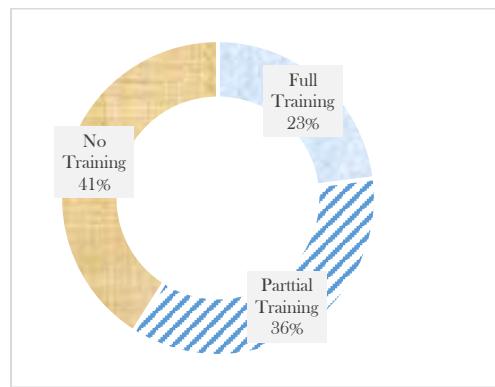


Fig. 4 Level of training undertaken by respondents

Source: Authors Compilation

Analysis (Figure 3) indicates that while about 61% of the respondents were fully aware of PR digitization and import of usage of AI in public communication, another 24% were

partially aware not knowing the full details, only 6% agreed not to be aware and 9% made no comments. This simple means that a whopping 85% of the respondents are in the picture of PR digitization and usage of AI. However, analysis (Figure 4) showcased that, even at the level of the awareness, only 23% of the respondents were fully trained to cope with the digital technology while about 36% were partially trained. This shows that about 41% of those who are aware of the wave of digitization are not trained to cope with it. This explains why a whole lot of the PR professionals are not keying into the digital and AI tools provided to make their practices easier. The revelation of this finding is that while the world is speedily changing in its operations especially at the realm of public communication, PR practitioners are not moving in the same frequency. This confirms the fears of Paul et al (2022), in that, because most of the training that may be required to cope with these changes, may require self-sponsorship.

Further analysis of (Figure 4) shows that as important as training is to the preparation for adoption of full digitization of PR as well as usage of the AI tools, respondents expressed reservations to why it has been difficult to participate in trainings. While about 30% of the respondents complained about non-availability of fund as their major constraints, about 18% disclosed that they lack the basic knowledge in computer usage and internet surfing. Only about 9% complained of non-availability of the right trainings at the right time, while about 8% disclosed that it is actually lack of interest in that they have advanced in age and may not be able to cope with the modern technologies. A good number of the respondents, about 35% complained of lack of basic infrastructure to anchor and participate in the requisite training. This may not be far from the fact raised by scholars like Russell & Norvig (2020) Suleiman et al (2020) Uche & Obi (2023), who unanimously agreed that; though the magic wand to improve PR profession is the digitization and AI application, it will still be a herculean task as the required communication infrastructure is far from being available in the nation and even the entire region. To Ajibade & Salami (2023), even when there is availability of training and funds to attend online, both power supply and internet connectivity will definitely frustrate the potential participants or even jerk the cost to an unaffordable level.

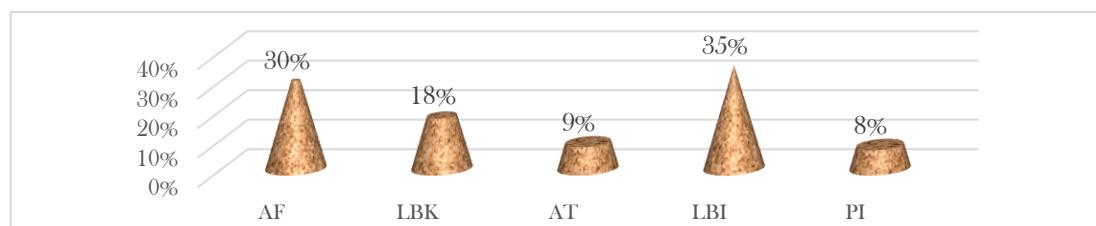


Fig. 4 Level of training undertaken by respondents¹

Source: Authors Compilation.

Econometrics

¹ AF = Availability of Fund, LBK = Lack of Basic Knowledge, AT = Availability of Training, LBI = Lack of Basic Infrastructure, PI = Poor Interest

Impact of PR Digitization and Usage of AI on Economic Development of South-East Nigeria

In the study, we estimated a logit regression analysis to envisage the influence of public relations digitization and adoption of AI promoting social development in South-East Nigeria using both the socio-economic, demographics and other variables listed below as predictors.

$$\text{Logit (ED)} = 5.021 + 0.411\text{Age} + (0.031)\text{Sex} + 0.913\text{Edu} + 0.110\text{Rel} + 0.802\text{Awe} + 2.137\text{Trn} + (-1.015)\text{Lotn} + 2.124\text{DAIPR}$$

Table 3: Impact of PR Digitization and Usage of AI on Economic Development of South-East Nigeria

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	Age	0.411	0.031	1.271	1	0.043	0.970	0.951	1.091
	Sex	-0.031	0.141	1.064	1	0.038	1.313	0.730	1.149
	Edu	0.913	0.013	3.327	1	0.021	2.020	0.943	1.022
	Rel	0.110	0.381	0.799	1	0.212	1.126	0.976	1.166
	Awe	0.802	0.095	1.072	1	0.625	0.898	0.694	1.161
	DAIPR	2.124	0.075	6.134	1	0.062	9.531	0.410	1.207
	Trn	2.137	0.010	0.417	1	0.016	3.080	0.986	1.182
	Lotn	-1.015	0.612	3.066	1	0.012	7.980	0.957	1.002
	Constant	5.021	0.213	4.621	1	0.025	8.120		

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age, Sex, Edu, Rel, Awe, Trn, Lotn, DAIPR

**significant at 5%; - a = This only refers to standard error (SE) b = Associated P Value of the Z value

Source: Authors' computation

In the analysis, the researcher conducted a test of the full model alongside a constant only model and established that the full model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set unvaryingly distinct between the "Yes" and "No" impact of public relations digitization and AI adoption ($\chi^2 = 38.146$, $p = .062$ with $df = 8$). Nagelkerke's R^2 of 0.815 which flagged a healthy relationship between prediction and grouping. Meanwhile, the prediction success overall was 84%, the Z - value for the **DAIPR** (digitization and AI adoption) = 6.134 with connected p - values of 0.062. As the alpha level of this study was set at 0.05, (5% Significant Level), the p-values of DAIPR is above 0.05, hence we accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that *digitization of public relations and usage of AI has not significantly promoted sustainable economic development of South East region*. Conversely, the EXP (B) value of the DAIPR = 9.531, denoting that, a unit increase in the digitization of PR and adoption of AI tools has an odds ratio of about 9.5 times as large.

Consequently, if effort toward digitizing PR and adoption of AI is increased by one unit, PR practitioners and the larger society will be about 10 times more likely to be economically empowered.

Impact of PR Digitization and Usage of AI on Social Development of South-East Nigeria

We as well conducted a logistic regression analysis to picture the influence of digitization of PR and AI adoption on promoting social development in South-East Nigeria. this was estimated using both the socio-economic, demographics and other variables listed below as predictors.

$$\text{Logit (RHB)} = 4.025 + 0.724\text{Age} + 0.981\text{Edu} + (1.061)\text{Rel} + 1.731\text{DAIPR} + 1.015\text{Awe} + (0.261)\text{Lotn} + 1.247\text{Trn}$$

Table 4: Impact of PR Digitization and Usage of AI on Social Development of South-East Nigeria

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	Constant	4.025	0.151	3.324	1	0.012	2.322		
	Age	0.724	0.324	1.002	1	0.014	1.170	0.453	1.075
	DAIPR	1.731	0.551	5.342	1	0.027	12.321	0.223	1.052
	Sex	1.032	0.314	0.128	1	0.036	2.143	0.754	1.219
	Edu	0.981	0.291	2.706	1	0.145	3.013	0.885	1.044
	Rel	-1.061	0.105	4.024	1	0.042	1.614	0.874	1.156
	Awe	1.015	0.021	0.472	1	0.009	0.918	0.793	1.114
	Trn	1.247	0.632	0.731	1	0.091	4.320	0.932	1.012
	Lotn	-0.216	0.123	0.491	1	0.042	4.680	0.461	1.423

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age, Sex, Edu, Rel, Awe, Trn, Lotn, DAIPR
 **significant at 5%; - a = This only refers to standard error (SE) b = Associated P Value of the Z value

Source: Authors' computation

Following the conduct of a test of the full model against a constant only model, the study noticed that the full model was statistically significant. This simply shows that the predictors as a set dependably separated between the "Yes" and "No" impact of public relations digitization and AI adoption. With the Nagelkerke's R^2 of 0.861, the indication is that there is a robust relationship between prediction and grouping. The prediction success overall was 81%, and the Z - value for the DAIPR was 5.342 with connected p - values of 0.027. Because the alpha level of this study was set at 0.05, (5% Significant Level), and the p-values of DAIPR is less than 0.05, we therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that: *digitization of public relations and usage of AI has significantly promoted sustainable social development of South East region*. Likewise, to take notice is that the EXP (B) value of

the DAIPR = 12.321, entailing that, a unit increase in the efforts toward PR digitization and AI adoption comes with an odds ratio of about 12.3 times as large. With this knowledge, any effort toward PR digitization and AI adoption by one unit will be about 12 times more likely to promote social development of the region.

Generally, this study points out that, there is a high level of awareness of the importance of digital technology and adoption of AI in the area of public relations practice, hence the significant prevalence. This finding stands with Akpan et al (2022), Adegbite (2023), in that the importance of digitizing PR can no longer be ignored or hidden. It challenges the positions of Okonkwo & Eze (2022) Okolo-Obasi et al (2025a), who opined that the nation is not ripe yet as a result of infrastructural deficient. The study established those numerous trainings are bound but many professionals lack the basic knowledge required to enroll. Though the application of AI tools in the region is still low, with the odd ratio of digitizing PR and adopting with adequate application AI tools, the study makes bold to say that, the capacity to make significant impact on social and economic development is very high.

The development capacity has been demonstrated in area of media monitoring and analysis, which this study agrees with Adegbite (2023), that AI generated alert systems has the capacity to notify PR professional, real-time concerning any important mentions or reputation risks while starting up emerging conversations. This finding is also in tune with Ajibade and Salami (2023), who noted that AI make it possible to detect more complex emotional states like happiness, anger, or sadness through sentiment analysis. In the same vein, confirming the positions of Uche & Obi (2023), this study noted that with automated content creation, human-sounding text can easily be created. With such creations, PR professional can instantly publish on breaking news and emerging trends. From the finding of the study, while towing the part of Udomah et al (2023), on predictive analytics for trend forecasting, this study confirmed from the key informant interviews that AI-powered predictive analytics enables PR professionals to predict future outcomes, allowing teams to use their resources better.

In the area of sentiment analysis, the study confirms the assertion of Eze & Chukwu (2024), in that, with AI, it becomes easier to track the shift in sentiment in real time by PR professionals and such enables quick respond instantly to any potential crisis that would have disturbed the society. Likewise, from the confirmations of key informants, the position of Ajibade & Salami (2023) that AI tools enables advanced audience targeting by analyzing individual user behavior and preferences to create personalized content that speaks directly to each audience segment was confirmed.

However, the opinion of the respondents shows that in media pitching, one must not forget that, to a reasonable extent, capacity of AI has tremendously developed, yet, the touch of human or the human element will always remain unmistakable in the feeling and authenticity. That is where the ethics of the profession must not be swept under the carpet. This aligns with scholars like Ajibade & Salami (2023), Onaleye (2023), Nwanmuoh et al

(2025), in that most PR professional threw caution into the wind and recklessly blame digitization and AI for controllable errors.

The analysis of this study proved that both age, Sex (gender) educational qualification and training received by a PR professional play major roles in promoting social and economic development using digitized PR and artificial intelligence. This disagrees with Ntuk et al (2022) who posited that women appears to be more involved in the digitization of PR than men, it rather confirms Nyitse and Agbeke (2023), that both sexes are actively involved but because men appear to have more time than women, they lead. Also, with the position of Ajibade & Salami (2023), this study confirms that, the older generation of PR practitioners are scarcely getting involved. To Nwanmuoh et al (2025) it is because of the required basic and subsequent trainings that are both physically and emotional tasking. From the point of educational qualification and professional trainings, the odd ratios for social development are 2.020 and 3.080 respectively and for economic development, 3.013 and 4.320, respectively. This is an indication that increase in effort of both are highly of importance to ensure proper adoption and application among the various tiers of professionals.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Digital technologies and application of artificial intelligence have, and continues to transform the modern-day life of people all over the world. The innumerable benefits of digitization abound and the impacts are felt in the manner of work, studies, traveling, shopping, communications and even entertainment. It is with regard to this that the finding of this work attempts to substantiate that, public relations practices has been enduringly altered by advancements in technology.

The significant slowly and steady rise in the usage of cutting-edge technologies and AI tools in PR has seriously improved media monitoring, data analysis, as well as sentiment analysis. Hence, it is our contention in this study that: the future holds many promises for the PR industry in Nigeria and South-East in particular. With the rate of internet penetration in the South-East region, digital technology adoption and application of AI tools remains an enigma that will move the region forward in both social and economic development with bold narratives that will resonate with brands and their audiences alike. However, an urgent need exists for knowledge base expansion because of the speedily changing needs. Of a truth, if the public relations professionals in the region must live up to expectations, they must ensure that staying ahead of the new trends is their priority. Hence, without much reservation, the trailblazing technologies must be embraced, and digital strategies relentlessly improved on. With this, the study will boldly say that, leading the future of PR requires deliberate and concerted investment in AI literacy, making wise choice of tools as well as continuous monitoring of ethical practice. The future of PR practice is heavily anchored on AI, as AI has the capacity of unveiling newer channels, unleashing the effectiveness of PR practice and driving professionals to innovate in ways hitherto unimagined.

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