

Professionalism and Competencies as Predictors of Public Relations Practitioners' Self-Efficacy: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

The essence of this research work is to test the predictive roles of attitudinal professionalism and competencies in public relations practitioners' self-efficacy. For the past three (3) decades, a lot of works have been conducted by scholars as part of an effort to uplift PR as a full pledge profession. However, scholars still lament the shortfall of PR practitioners in the discharge of their professional duties. This work is an attempt to study public relations practitioners' ability in accomplishing professional tasks which self-efficacy represents. The work conceptualizes Six (6) PR self-efficacy dimensions and also tests the predictive role of attitudinal professionalism; which is practitioners' commitment to their profession and competencies; which represents sets of behaviors that are required to accomplish organizational objectives. It appraises the importance of commitment to professional development and mastering professional competencies that are evolving and changing. Conceptualizing the dimension of PR self-efficacy remains the originality of this work.

Keywords: Attitudinal professionalism, Competencies, Public Relations, Self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Any attempt to report public relations advancement would be short without appraising the magnificent role played by researchers/scholars, through their perpetual interest and agitation for professionalizing the discipline of public relations as a field of study. Profession has been viewed as an occupational term that shows a domain of expertise (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; W. Chung & Choi, 2012); J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984); (Meyer & Leonard, 2014; Sha, 2011). Profession is thus; imperatively dissimilar from craft or technician for the purpose of knowledge acquired, which determine the competence of a particular individual in carrying out a specific task.

A cursory look into public relations literature, one can find out that many works have been conducted to strengthen the discipline as a profession. Some of them include: the seminal works of J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984), Cameron, Sallot, and Lariscy (1996), Cornelissen (2000), Abdullah (2006), Molleda and Alhassan (2006), (W. Chung & Choi, 2012), (Meyer & Leonard, 2014) to mention but a few. However, most of these works and others are centered towards what scholars call the structural/functionalist school of thought; which emphasized on the contributions of institutions such as PR professional Associations, Accreditation, Theory building, in the society.

On the other hand, looking at profession from a more attitudinal and behavioral perspective, scholars emphasized the need for the development of peoples' capacity to passionately undertake careers (Evans, 2011; Evetts, 2011; Lee, 2014). This is essential, particularly with today's rapid challenges of organizational demand.

As described in (Botan, Hazleton, Botan, & Hazleton, 2006), that scholarly research moves forward by competition between divergent perspectives, not by the dominance of any one perspective. It is therefore against this background that this work specifically settled to study public relations profession from the view point of practitioners' commitment to their profession (attitudinal professionalism) and their mastery of skills, knowledge alongside their personal attributes (professional competencies) for the advancement of their profession. These two important variables are hypothesized to predict the capacity of PR practitioners to act well in the discharge of their organizational duties; which is technically referred to as *self-efficacy*.

2. Problem Statement

Several studies have indicated incredible development experienced in the field of public relations within a few decades, especially on the area of professionalization. On the other hand, some researchers lamented deteriorating short-falls in the practitioners' ability to advance their organizational performance (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Cernicova, Dragomir, & Palea, 2011; W. Chung & Choi, 2012; Otubanjo, Amujo, & Melewar, 2009).

For instance, as described in the work of Abdullah and Threadgold (2008), PR practice is neither complex nor sophisticated; they lamented that competencies of practitioners are found to be very low, thus, they can hardly demonstrate how relevant and efficient their performance is. While Cernicova et al. (2011), reported the lack of self-confidence for the new Public Relations employees to undertake their duties efficiently. They reported that majority of graduates who partake in a large *survey* conducted in Romania (comprising PR practitioners and non-PR alike) reported their work environment as their sources of proficiency, not the knowledge they were taught in the schools they have graduated. This means that practitioners need to something personal, beyond what they learned from classrooms.

Similarly, Amujo and Melewar (2011), lamented the shortcomings of the talent of many public relations

practitioners and labeled them as mere technicians. Scholars (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Steyn, 2009) have described the role of such technicians as one who prepares and produces communication materials for public relations program, or perform non-managerial duties such as carrying out order (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), regarding the execution of PR activities (L. A. Grunig, 1990). By implication as a result of their low competence, they may fall short in serving at managerial and more recently a strategic cadre of organizations as professionals.

While a lot has been done by PR researchers in the area of structural professionalism, this framework wants to argue that there is a need for more attention to the personal commitment of practitioners towards their profession. As described in Wallace and Kay (2008), achievement of professionalism and its sustainability rest on practitioners' personal commitment and competence. As a result, this work is designed to emphasize the need for PR workers' attitudinal professionalism i.e. practitioners' personal commitment to their profession. In other words, PR practitioner should be attitudinally professional; personally committed to his profession. This is via the gesture of ethically distinguishing a practitioner as well-behaved (Parkan, 2008); being ambassador to PR discipline with dedication to duty and commitment to its progress (Hammer, 2000); feeling the inevitability of the field and the requisite for its autonomy (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985) and serving the public to the best he/she can. This is what is meant to be attitudinally professional.

The work also focused on the need for mastery of professional competencies as another independent construct. Competencies, on the other hand, represent "behavioral repertoires or sets of behaviors that support the attainment of organizational objectives (Gregory, 2008). Thus, Gregory (2008) added that it has to do with how skills, knowledge and personal attributes are used for appreciable performance (Bartram, 2004) or put together to attain organizational objectives (Tench & Moreno, 2015).

In the recent work of Tench and Moreno (2015), on public relations competencies, the authors observed the lack of research works on the development of individual PR practitioners. Acquisition of competencies (skills, knowledge and personal attributes) is necessary for public relations professionalism. In view of the above, this conceptualization is trying to say that when practitioners became *attitudinally professionals* and learn the necessary *competencies* related to public relations field, that would boost their ability to face a task and accomplish it diligently which *self-efficacy* represent. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capability to mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and course of action needed to meet given situational demand (Bandura, 1994).

Practitioners with low levels of capability would dodge from high challenging jobs and choose less difficult ones to perform. They tend to recognize hard roles as threats, not a challenge that should be learned and overcome (Bandura, 1994). They rush to the conclusion that difficult jobs are attainable, persist in failures and negative outcome. Hence, they quickly lose confidence in their ability (Albert, 1986). As a result, practitioners need ambassadorial attitudes towards their profession. They equally master all competencies associated with their profession to boost their self-efficacy in today's competitive world.

3. Literature Review

In the last 3 decades, Public Relations (PR) has achieved marvelous growth as an academic discipline. This can be perceived through the lenses of different communication scholars across the globe. Notable among them are the seminal works of theorizing and conceptualizing the field by the likes of (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984); PR roles studies, (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 2003); issues related to knowledge and skills as reviewed Gregory (2008) which is more than adequately covered by professional bodies (such as CIPR, 2006; PRSA, 1993, 1994, 2006) and many text books such as Cutlip, Allen, and Center (2006); PR research paradigm and approaches; (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 2008; Holtzhausen, 2000; L'Etang, 2013; Toth, 2002).

While focusing on PR works in different countries, a lot has been done to reports various experiences in different countries which also tell the different speed at which PR progress in different parts of the world. All these account together formed the developing stage of the full-pledged PR profession. This can be seen from the work of J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) and other scholars that reported the development of PR in many countries across the globe.

Sha (2011) reported the development of PR in the United State which is believed to the largest PR industry in the world. Chung and Choi (2012) moreover made a comparative analysis on PR curriculum in the US, the UK and South Korea, where US PR is found to be more balanced resting between teaching theories and practically learning the art.

Gregory (2012) on the other hand has elucidated how PR gets advanced in the UK as the second largest after that of US. In the quest to show professional of PR field in the UK, the author has disclosed that many professionals studied the profession as major or minor.

Valentini (2014) on the other hand reports the institutionalization of PR in Italy. The author described that PR education in Italy is largely a duplication of American curriculums. Though there are progress in the last ten (10) years, the profession is largely perceived as practiced based. This is unlike in the US and UK which has organized trade organizations such as PRSA and CIPR.

Abdullah and Threadgold (2008) have earlier reported that PR profession has progressed in Malaysia, but lamented that practitioners' are mere technicians, with low mastery of competencies. Though Malaysian PR is well advanced with PR educational courses all over the country and professional organization, PRICAMalaysia, membership is voluntary, which has giving chance for a non-PR expert to also practice the profession.

Whereas in Vietnam, PR is an emerging field (Doan & Bilowol, 2014). PR development can be traced to the 1990's when the US lift embargo on the country. Though rapid changes have been witnessed, PR professionalism is totally absent as there is a lack of professional association, code of ethics and robust training.

Ayish (2005), also reported PR in United Arab Emirate (UAE), where both the government and private multinational organizations invested on university education to meet the demand of qualified PR practitioners in both public and private organization from the 1990s to date. Even though the profession is still struggling for recognition, but there is the presence of both regional and local associations which are very important to professionalism.

The quick expansion of PR in UAE is also extended to Romania. As Cinca (2012) elucidated, the history of PR in Romania. The author described that the profession was first established in 1991. Academic program and professional associations were established. The author described that by 2012, the country has more than 300 PR firms apart from in-house practitioners.

However in Nigeria which is the target of this study, modern PR is popularly traced to 1945 during the World War II, but Nigerian Institute of Public Relations was first established in 1963 which take charge of training and guiding the activities of practitioners. The Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (the highest body that manages PR affairs in the country) was finally chartered in 1990 to serve as a corporate charged with the mandate to ascertain knowledge and skills that should be learnt for individuals to be licensed as a qualified PR practitioner (Otubanjo et al., 2009). Nigerian PR has witnessed some degree of development as there is a professional association, code of ethics, as well as the accreditation process. But still weak in professionalism as imposing the codes and sanctioning quacks remain a mirage. The practitioner's outline is lack of strategic quality.

Hence it should be pertinent that PR has progressed across the globe; however, as reported by scholars, there are challenges that need to be addressed as part of advancement to the field in different part of the globe. This work is thus conceptualized to study the predictive power of PR practitioners' commitment towards their profession (attitudinal professionalism) and PR professionals learning, skills and personal attributes (competencies) on their ability to accomplish a task (self-efficacy). This is targeted as a wake-up call for practitioners to be concerned with the development of their disciplines and how that affects their personal input. The next part discussed the two independent variables (attitudinal professionalism and competences) and the dependent variable (self-efficacy).

3.1 Attitudinal professionalism

As explained earlier, the profession is described as an occupational term that shows a domain of expertise. Unlike structural professionalism which stressed on structures of the profession, attitudinal professionalism deals with professional's relations with his own profession; it deals with summery of his/her own commitment towards his/her professional career and its advancement (Freeman, 1994).

Attitudinal professionalism deals with a predisposition, feeling, emotion, or thought that uphold the idea of a profession and serves as a basis for professional behavior (Hammer, 2000). In every profession, there should be a set of attitudes and behavior believed to be suitable in that discipline (Merriam-Webster, 1997) which should serve as a code of conduct to professional practice.

Studies on attitudinal profession have been conducted in different disciplines which include: Freeman (1995) on high education; (Mat & Zabidi, 2010) on Professors; (Kamali et al. 2014) on Heads of Educational Institutions; (Lee, 2014), frontline among others. Most of the conceptualizations turned to Hall (1968) model of attitudinal professionalism that used some (Wilensky, 1964) structural dimensions and his attitudinal concepts to develop his own model. After an intensive literature search, Hall developed five (5) dimensions which captured attitudinal professionalism. These include:

- Using Professionals As A Major Source Of Reference
- Self-Regulation
- Sense Of Calling
- Publics Orientation
- Autonomy

3.1.1 Using professionals as a source of reference

This is the act of participating formally in the activities of the registered associations of which one is a member. In the case of Nigeria- for example, there is the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), chartered in 1991 and empowered to license the public relations professionals. As a result of one's participation, one can benefit from the association's publications, conferences and annual general meetings to update him with new strategies and research directions.

Depending on status, and country of residence, one can also register with PRCAN; Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria. Similarly, registering with more international bodies like the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) would open the door for professionals to participate in global public relations activities.

It also includes informally socializing with colleagues to exchange views on how things are done in the field. Practitioners stand the chance to advance their career as a result of partaking in the activities of their professional association. So a professional is expected to be engaged in ‘ongoing inquiry’ (Parkan 2008, in Hammer, 1996).

3.1.2 Self-regulation

The attitudinal professionalism of self-regulation deals with professionals’ ethical character and passionately distinguishing himself as well behaved (Parkan, 2008). Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) have explained that profession must be *exclusive* and *complex*. By self-regulations, it also symbolizes the impression that only a fellow professional is qualified to judge the work of a professional (Freeman, 1994).

Self-regulation also contends that practitioner should be allowed to give his maximum input in managing organizational image and reputation; this may be through influencing the required budget to be accrued to his unit or department. Freeman (1994) observed the distinction between professionals and non-professionals, in that non-professionals relied on customers who make informed decisions as to what goods and services they need, and from whom to purchase them.

Professionals, on the other hand, define what is right and best for the clients, with little or no input from the client or organization. Professionals depend on their knowledge, skills, and personal expertise to make a judgment (Evetts, 2011).

3.1.3 Sense of Calling

Sense of calling is the professional’s attitude of being an integral part of his professional field. This is the attitude of being an ambassador to the profession. A PR professional for instance should not consider him/herself as doing a common *job*; rather should consider what he/she is doing as a *career*, (Parkan, 2008 in Hammer, 1996). In Parkan’s elucidation, attitudinal sense of calling separates a profession from a common occupation. This means a PR professional most upholds to the values of his profession and work towards its advancement.

As earlier described Freeman (1994), a practitioner should attitudinally be more dedicated to his profession than his/her working organization. By so doing, practitioners would maintain a strong bond with their profession as ambassadors. Sense of calling sounds like religious duties which have to do with ones dedicated to God, but in related to attitudinal professionalism, has to do with self-actualization, self-realization and self-fulfillment as it stresses work as part of life (Lee, 2014 in Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Hall and Chandler, 2005).

3.1.4 Service to the Public

Belief in service to the public is the idea that profession is essential and that both the public and the practitioner benefits from the work performed by the profession. This is found central to public relations as a profession. The work of a PR practitioner is to maintain the mutual relation between the organization and its publics. A PR practitioner acts as a monitor and evaluator, key policy and strategic adviser, trouble shooter/problem solver and issue management expert (Moss, Newman, & DeSanto, 2005).

Understanding the sociology of publics is necessary to a practitioner. Classifying their specifications (internal, external, immediate publics etc.) and how best to plan for his client/organization’s reputation in dealing with the publics. The importance of public service cannot be over-emphasized. It is part of practitioner’s social responsibility to hold and sustain public’s trust as regards to his organization or clients. Even though some professionals work with for-profit organizations, they should not exploit publics (Freeman 1994, in Goode, 1969) as that constitutes an unprofessional attitude.

3.1.5 Autonomy

Autonomy is the fifth dimension according to Hall’s professional dimensions. This is the idea of giving a free hand for practitioners to make a professional judgment in the discharge of their organizational duties without external pressure from their organizations or clients. The concept of autonomy as defined by Hall has become the cornerstone of several more recent models of professionalism (Freeman 1994). One of such is (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985) who indicated that autonomy from both clients and employing organization formed the basis for the power model of professionalism (Freeman 1994). They subscribed to Hall that autonomy is an attitudinal concept, which is central in their conceptualization of professionalism.

Hall’s attitudinal professionalism model has been widely used in the study of attitudinal professionalism, (Morrow & Goetz, 1988; Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985; Freeman 1994; Hammer, 2000 and Lee, 2014) in different fields.

Attitudinal professionalism motivates individuals to be able to accomplish a course of action.

Attitudinal professionalism is found to be related to employees’ service efficacy Lee (2014). As a result, this work argues that attitudinal professionalism predicts public relations practitioners’ self-efficacy because efficacy starts with self and then reflected service.

3.2 Competencies

Competency is a strategic idea propounded by (Prahalad, 1990) as a way of evolving a new strategy for organizational development. Competencies as an idea is developed as a differentiation style for organizations to uncover what they are best at doing and sustained it as a profit maximization strategy that is difficult for competitors to copy. It is an idea born out of an organizational need to study well what they are good at and sustain it as a strong hold for profit maximization which should also be kept far from imitation by competitors. (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990) describe competencies as “the collective learning in the organization, especially how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate multiple streams of technologies”.

It should attain both utility and scarcity. For utility is simply referred to as the ability of the organization to serve the needs of the publics. Publics need should be studied and satisfied to ensure continuous loyalty. Scarcity, on the other hand, is the competencies are beyond competitors replication. It should be impossible to copy; so that existing publics and customers are retained and others are strategically attracted.

In the domain of communication and public relations, the study of competencies of the employee is found to be important if not indispensable. This is not unconnected with the fact the discipline of public relations is struggling to attain the status of professionalism.

The concept of competencies sometimes used interchangeably with *role*, *skills* or *personal attributes*. The constructs are quit interwoven, but they are not without differences when we look into the delineations of some scholars.

As described by Tench and Moreno (2015), *role* refers to responsibilities given to an individual; *skills* are what practitioner is able to do perform his role effectively; *knowledge* is defined as what practitioner is supposed to know to effectively discharge his duty and *personal attributes* are soft or employability skills.

Competencies on the other hand as explained Tench and Moreno (2015) while quoting Gregory (2008) refers to “behavioral sets or sets of behaviors that support the attainment of organizational objectives. Thus, it has to do with how knowledge and skills are put into work to satisfy organizational objectives”.

In the public relations literature, many studies have been conducted on the *roles* of practitioners. As pointed Gregory (2008), the seminal works of Broom, 1982; Broom & Smith, 1979, the work of Dozier (1992), and that of Moss et al. (2005) are pointers to that direction.

In the area of knowledge and skills, Gregory (2008) explicated that it was more than adequately covered by professional bodies (such as CIPR, 2006; PRSA, 1993, 1994, 2006) and many text books (such as Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Newton, Turk & Krueberg, 2000, Pritchard Fawkes & Tech in tech & Yeomaris, 2006; Skinner, Von Essen & Mersham 2004).

But much less have been done on the competencies of public relations professionals as she observed. Tench and Moreno (2015) while subscribing to the view point of Brunton (2011) explained that *role* is denoting tasks and responsibilities; but in this world where roles keep on changing, *competency* is the right term to use, and it is more stable, because it refers to underlying necessities geared towards the success of an organization.

This spiritedly stimulated scholars from different parts of the world to begin conducting researches to disclose the necessary competencies for the advancement of the public relations discipline.

In the qualitative work of Gregory (2008), she was able to come up with ten competencies each for private and public organizations’ PR practitioners in the UK. While Watson and Sreedharan (2010) in their working paper, involving practitioners on UK, France, Germany, Netherland and North to find out the future competencies of practitioners reported new media technology competence; analytical and relationship building skills, take charge of CSR, policy making, and ability to show- case their relevance to C-level so that they would be respected.

In the work of Cernicova et al. (2011); they reported 3 top groups of competencies for PR practitioners which include; using principle, strategies, rules and norms of oral and written communication in different social context; using IT and new media for professional communication; and understanding communication as a social construction of reality and as a major factor in creating, sustain and/or changing cultural differences. However in their own study, (Tench & Moreno, 2015), reported four top competencies, which includes; technology, cross-cultural skills, new media and communication skills.

Moreover, Flynn (2014) has discussed ten (10) that are traced to the works of many scholars. As can further be seen, in the seminal work of (Scholz & Colleen Killingsworth, 2014), (an investigation headed by Flynn) they explored number of competencies number of necessary competencies and skills which includes strategic management, financial literacy, business (acumen) expertise, analytical measurement, leadership training, crisis management, relationship building, PR professional writing, media relation, project management, verbal communication, interpersonal communication and social media. Others include stakeholder relations, client relationship management, people management, event management, graphic design, web design, videography, time management and ethical decision making. The use of these items to measure competencies is necessary for that major skills, personal attributes and knowledge are reported.

Thus, it should be observed that unlike attitudinal professionalism that has five dimensions as earlier reported, competencies construct has no dimensions. It has items that can be in the measurement.

3.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy as a construct was developed by a prominent Psychologist, Albert Bandura. Self-efficacy is a peripheral derived from his heuristically tested Social Cognitive Theory postulated to explain man's behavior in the environment.

Self-efficacy is defined as beliefs in one's capability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and course of action needed to meet given situational demand. (Bandura, 1988), described it as a comprehensive summery or judgment regarding the ability of a person to perform a particular task. Wood and Bandura (1989), also described it as a dynamic constraint which changes over time.

It usually enhances human accomplishment and personal wellbeing. The nature of a person's self-efficacy determined the extent to which he can respond to a particular situation. It is, therefore, a kind of consequences of the social interaction between the outside environment and other self-adjusted mechanisms and personal capabilities, experience and achievements (Niu, 2010).

Bandura (1994) argues that individuals with a high sense of efficacy usually consider difficult task as a challenge that can be mastered and solved, rather than a threat that should be avoided. However, such an efficacious outlook stimulates intrinsic motivation and deep engrossment in the activities they performed. They set challenging targets and pursue them with outmost vigor.

Similarly, they remain focused and determined and sustain efforts in the face of failure. They quickly recover their sense of efficacy after failure. They hold the belief that failure is as a result of insufficient effort or difficult knowledge and skills which are acquirable. They face a difficult situation with confidence that they would be on-top of it.

In sharp contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy, doubt their capabilities and distance themselves from difficult tasks. They also have aspirations and shallow commitment to their goals. When they are faced with difficult or challenging situations, they attribute it to their personal deficiency and anticipate negativities instead of focusing on re-strategizing to bounce back and perform efficiently. They quickly give up when they fail, slow in recovery from failure, as a result of which they fall easy victims to stress and depression.

Wood and Bandura (1989) also described it as a dynamic constraint which changes over time. This explains why he along with other proponents came up with the concept of self-efficacy which deals with people's belief of their capability to change the environment through their actions. Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014), while referring to Woods & Bandura (1989), observed that; people who trust their efficacy are more likely to initiate actions and persist in their efforts.

However, unless employees believe that they can gather necessary behavior, cognitive and motivational resources, they may end up dwelling on the formidable aspects of the work, exert insufficient effort and as a result fail.

As formulated Bandura, there are four basic sources of self-efficacy. This includes mastery of experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion and emotional state.

- **Mastery of experience:** is the most effective source of self-efficacy. It has to do with learning skills that guarantee a person's ability to accomplish a task. Someone who experiences success might like to feel discouraged when he fails. He/she, therefore, should be encouraged to overcome difficulties and consider it as a result of poor planning.
- **Vicarious experience:** this is the act of managing self by observing what others are doing. Seeing others being successful will motivate a person towards trying his best to attain success. Whereas observing others failures can serve as demotivation factor. Vicarious experiences also deal with modeling.
- **Social persuasion:** this has to do with the act of persuading people to boost their self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion is likely to generate momentum to help individuals to accomplish a task, but over doing it can produce a bad result when it is found sentimental, e.g. some individuals may not possess the skills they persuaded as having.
- **Emotional state:** this has to do with individuals' ability to manage their emotional state as they deal with different situations. It deals with how people react to stress and tensions and their judgment of its causations.

3.3.1 Self-efficacy and performance

Numerous studies have depicted how the efficacy of employees impact positively on the workplace, this includes organizational productivity; work performance, adaptability to new technology (Lee, 2014), work engagement (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014) learning outcome (Guo, Piasta, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010) and so on. But there is mere absence of studies on public relations practitioners' self-efficacy in the existing literature even though is fairly needed.

A lot of works have proven a nexus between self-efficacy and work related performances portrayed in (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Some studies reviewed in this work which proven the relations between self-efficacy and performance include that of Webb, Vandiver et al. (2015), who found out that students' self-efficacy predicts their writing skills. This is done after 6 weeks of training sessions. Whereas in the work of Parker, Marsh, Ciarrochi,

Marshall, and Abduljabbar (2014) involving large scale data in Australia; have also conducted another study which has found that students self-efficacy on mathematics can predict their university entry.

While Parker et al. (2014) focused on student entry, Piperopoulos and Dimov (2015) on the other hand focused on entrepreneurial tendencies. It was established that students' self-efficacy is related to registering for practically oriented courses and negatively related to theoretically oriented courses. This can be related to the study of J. Y. Chung, Lee, and Heath (2013) which found the relations between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intentions via entrepreneurial learning behavior. While the above focused on undergraduate study,

Lambie, Hayes et al. (2014) focused on Ph.D. students. Results of Analysis have shown the relations between self-efficacy and high level of research knowledge, self-efficacy and publishing journal article; self-efficacy and prior research courses completed.

While the above mentioned focused on students as respondents, others focused on employees. Guo et al. (2010) aimed at analyzing the relations between self-efficacy and classroom quality. Teachers' self-efficacy was found to be related to elementary teaching certification; their self-efficacy also predicts children's gain in print media awareness and vocabulary gain.

Moreover, in Caesens and Stinglhamber (2014), self-efficacy found to be related to employees work engagement. It is also related to job satisfaction and negatively related to psychological strain. Nevertheless, Niu (2010) has found that self-efficacy is related to career commitment, and that of age and educational background have positive and significant relations with self-efficacy.

In the same vain, Griffin (2009) has proven that role-breadth self-efficacy (the ie level at which individuals are capable of accomplishing wide and more proactive role, beyond traditional stated technique and requirement) predicts four dimensions of performance; including team member proactivity, organizational member proactivity, team member proficiency and organizational member proficiency. Hence, these and many other studies have shown the relations between self-efficacy and performance as well as self-efficacy predictive role on performance.

3.3.2 Predictors of Self-efficacy

While the abovementioned, focused on how self-efficacy in enhances performance, others try to study what predicts self-efficacy. This explains the fact that self-efficacy is not a given entity or static. It can increase and thus can be predicted by the presence of many factors.

Many studies have mentioned the predictors of self-efficacy which include the empirical study of Hassall, Arquero, Joyce, and Gonzalez (2013), which has found the oral and written communication competence of respondents predict their self-efficacy. (Gkolia, Dimitrios, & Koustelios, 2016) has also studied the predictive role of background characteristics (such as teachers' gender, teaching experience, and educational level and age effect) on self-efficacy of preliminary and secondary school teachers. When data was analyzed, it was proven that high-aged teachers (those above four one years) are more self-efficacious than those that are younger. Gender was also found as a factor; in that male teachers are more self-efficacious than female on instrumental strategy, student engagement and classroom management.

While in Slåtten (2014), the survey was designed to test the determinants of creative self-efficacy. The determinants were conceptualized to include transformational leadership, learning orientation and autonomy. It was confirmed that all the three (3) dimensions determined self-efficacy with autonomy being the top, followed by learning orientation and leadership transformation. Moreover, Lee (2014), focused on attitudinal professionalism as a predictor of employee functional efficacy and service quality. The results have positively proven the prediction.

Therefore using the above mentioned studies, one can observe that self-efficacy is not a given entity. For a person to feel able there should be certain determinants, predictors or qualities, which serve as building a foundation or correlate the possible of performing a particular action. Finally, it should be keenly observed this study dwells within this type of category. The objective is to taste the predictive value of attitudinal professionalism and competencies on PR self-efficacy.

4. Conceptual Framework

This research work is conceptualized to test the predictive role of attitudinal professionalism and competencies in public relations practitioners' self-efficacy. In the first place, self-efficacy is a construct derived from a social cognitive theory which was propounded by Bandura and colleagues Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) as an extension of his earlier work on social learning theory.

Social cognitive theory is not only about learning, but also extends to cover cognition as constructs such as self-mechanism which goes beyond learning and social behavior. Bandura posits that cognition influences the contribution of thought process to human motivation, attitudes and action. Social cognitive theory has a troika dimension of a *person*, his *environment* and also his *behavior*. Employees processed what they need to do in accomplishing organizations objectives. Whatever they intend to do depends on their belief of capability and the learning from their environment. These can further be expanded as can be seen below:

- i. Personal: this has to do with whether a person has high or low self-efficacy toward a particular behavior

- (i.e. for a professional to hold a belief that he has personal abilities to suitably accomplish organizational objective).
- ii. Behavioral: the response individuals receive after they perform a behavior (i.e. Provide chances for the learner to experience successful learning as a result of performing the behavior correctly).
 - iii. Environmental: characteristics of the environment or setting that influence the individual's ability to efficaciously accomplish an assigned task (i.e. setting environmental conditions conducive for improved self-efficacy by providing appropriate support and materials).

This conceptualization can comfortably reside in the above context because any practitioner who is found to be attitudinally professional and also learn PR competencies, he can be said to be well equipped with the necessary qualities that influence how he thinks. In other words, that will develop his perceived ability to attain organizational objectives which self-efficacy represents.

FRAMEWORK

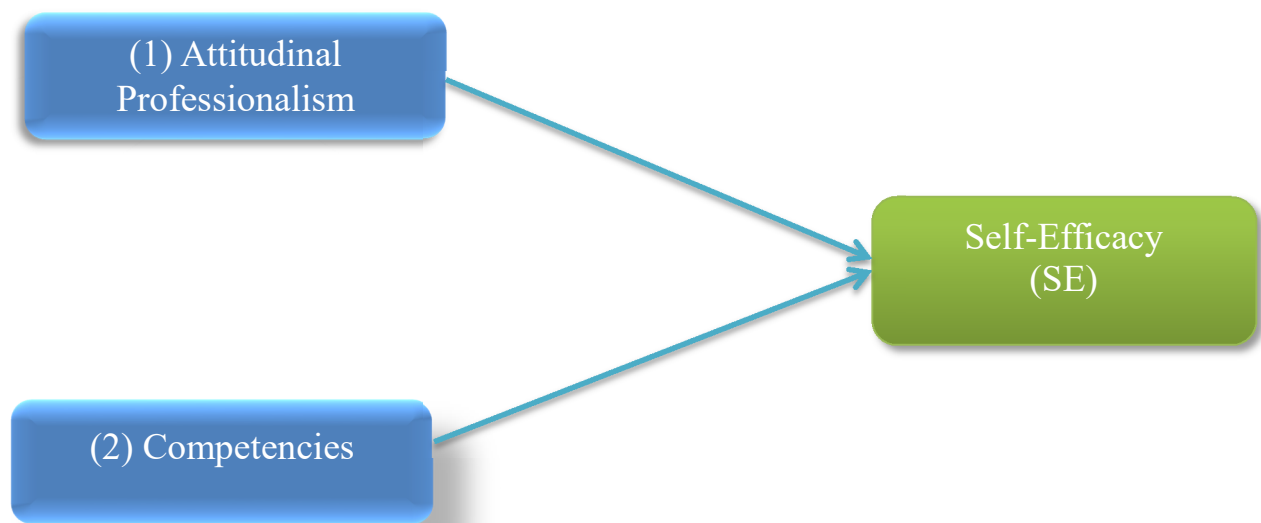


Figure 1

While trying to access practitioners' attitudinal professionalism, we adopt the measure developed by Hall (1968) which has been used by many researchers across the globe as earlier stated.

- The use of the professional organization as a major reference is the act of formal organization and informal colleague meetings as a major source of ideas and judgments for how a practitioner goes about his duties.
- A belief in service to the public is the idea of essentiality of the profession and believer that works performed benefits both professionals and publics practitioner.
- Belief in self-regulation-This involves the belief that the person best qualified to judge the work of a professional is a fellow professional and the view that such a practice is desirable and practical. It is a belief in colleague control.
- Sense of calling to the field call for the dedication of the professional to his work and the feeling that he would probably want to do the work even if fewer extrinsic rewards were available.
- Autonomy is succinctly the feeling that the practitioner should be free to make his own decisions without external pressures from clients, those who are not members of his profession, or from his employing organizations.

Whereas in trying to measure competencies, commutations scholars have not reached a consensus on the clear cut competencies required for PR practitioners Jeffrey and Brunton (2010). However, after a background research conducted by these researchers, prior to this conceptualization, it was discovered that PR competencies and skills as discussed in the work Scholz and Colleen Killingsworth (2014), (an investigation headed by Flynn) encompassed a number of competencies which have been discussed by different studies. These include strategic management, financial literacy, business (acumen) expertise, analytical measurement, leadership training, crisis management, relationship building, PR professional writing, media relation, project management, verbal communication, interpersonal communication and social media. Others include stakeholder relations, client relationship management, people management, event management, graphic design, web design, videography, time management and ethical decision making. The use of these items to measure competencies is necessary for that

major skills, personal attributes and knowledge are reported.

However, for self-efficacy, as described in Bandura (2006) self-efficacy is issue specific, even though many measures have been developed, but no one is found reflective on the PR practitioners' job tactics. However, this work resolved to use the popular J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) model which has captured the practitioners' job tactics. In the work of Amujo and Melewar (2011), where 60 Nigerian PR newsletters were analyzed, it was found that the contents reflect the practice of these four PR models. On the other hand, in trying to capture what is not clearly represented in the model which is also present in African PR practice, Holtzhausen, Petersen, and Tindall (2003) included *African Dialogic Model*; which is based on two-way African Dialogue using oral medium is also added to be the fifth dimension. Whereas, J. E. Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, and Lyra (1995); in their work on India, Taiwan and Greece, Kiambi and Nadler (2012) in Kenya and Wu and Baah-Boakye (2009) have also discussed the presence of *Personal Influence Model*, in these developing nations. For the fact that Nigeria is also a developing nation which shares some similarities with the above mentioned, this dimension was also added. As a result, the study is conceptualized to have six dimensions for public relations practitioners' self-efficacy.

- *Publicity self-efficacy*: This is the PR practitioner's ability to prepare content that is targeted at publicizing or propagating his organization/client's needs in accordance with the organization's visions and missions.
- *Persuasion self-efficacy*: This is the professional's perceived ability to motivate publics towards accepting persuasive messages on behalf of his /her organization/client. This can be achieved through the use of press release, press briefing, conferences etc.
- *Two-way asymmetrical self-efficacy*: two-way asymmetrical simply refers to the PR practitioner's belief in his ability to conduct researchers such as public attitude surveys to find out the best way of sending messages to his target publics. It also involves his/her ability to evaluate the messages he has sent to ascertain how effectively it has served the interest of his organization/client.
- *Two-way Symmetrical self-efficacy*: two-way symmetrical is described as practitioner's perceive belief on his ability to establish and maintain the mutual relationship between the organization and its publics by fostering two-way professional manuscript to ensure amicable resolve of contending cases, respect from both sides and sustaining intertwined relations.
- *Africa Dialogic Model*: Africa dialogic self-efficacy means the ability of PR professionals to developed and send PR messages to the audience using two-way dialogue based on African "oral nature" and "peoples alignment" through the use of short stories, songs, dramas and organizing of mass rallies.
- *Personal-influence self-efficacy*: personal influence self-efficacy finally denotes the perceived ability of PR practitioners to create a contact using his/her own personal connection for the benefits of hi/her organization. In PR, it is very common that political leaders and corporations tend to appoint public relations executives that excel in especially journalism career. This may be as a result of their vast experience which can benefit their new employee.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Instruments development

In designing the instrument, a group of academics comprising A Professor, Associate Professor, A Ph.D. scholar and their postgraduate students put together after a rigorous research agrees on the following. Hall (1968) and Snizek (1972) attitudinal professionalism model which is widely sued by scholars is adapted to measure attitudinal professionalism. The wordings in the questionnaire items were edited to reflect the attitudinal professionalism of PR practitioners. The original five points likert scale was also maintained and two more questions were added. In measuring Competencies, items in Flynn (2014) and Scholz and Colleen Killingsworth (2014) is adapted, which five points likert scale was also maintained. Lastly is the self-efficacy scale. As earlier described, six dimensions were developed using J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) original 16 items and eight other additional items developed by scholars who modified the model. The items were changed to reflect the need for testing ability. As elucidated by Bandura (2006), self-efficacy measurement items should reflect what a respondent "can do" not what a respondent "will do". Using the word self-efficacy is avoided to minimize the chances of arriving at socially desirable answers. Five points likert scale was also used which is similar to what was used by Grunig and Hunt, and eight other additional items developed by scholars who modified the model. The items were changed to reflect the need for testing ability.

FULL FRAMEWORK

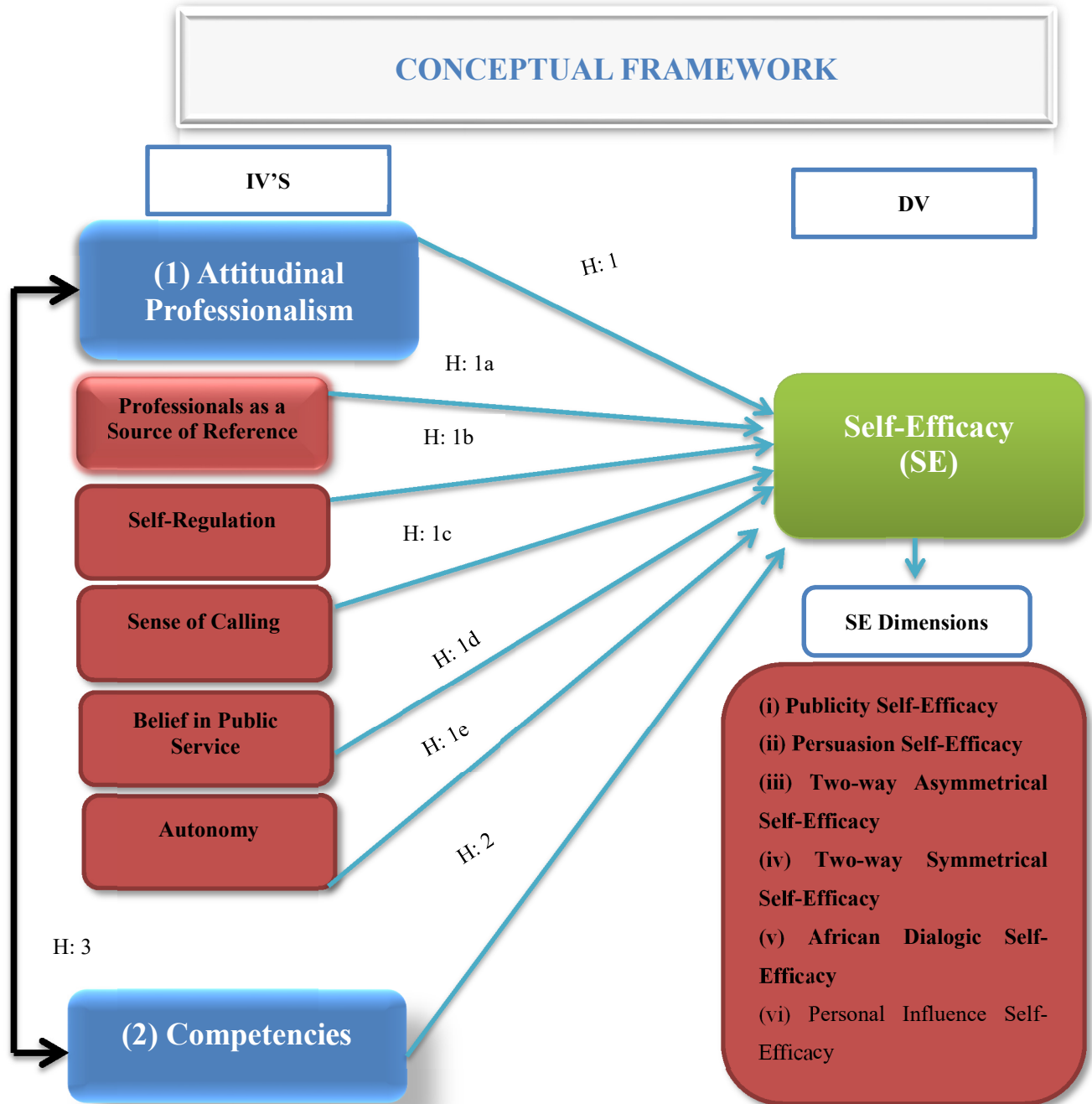


Figure 2

As elucidated by Bandura (2006), self-efficacy measurement items should reflect what a respondent “can do” not what a respondent “will do”. Using the word self-efficacy is avoided to minimize the chances of arriving at socially desirable answers. Five points likert scale was also used which is similar to what was used by Grunig and Hunt, and Holtzhausen et al. (2003).

After developing the instruments, it sent given to Ph.D. students in the domain for face validity. It was then later sent to three other experts in PR for critiquing and constructs validity. Interviews were also conducted with experts that are familiar with this research’s location. When that has been done, 1 item was added in “using practitioners as a reference” and another was subtracted from “Autonomy” both dimensions used to measure attitudinal professionalism. Similarly, another item was removed in the second dimension of self-efficacy “persuasion” and one was added in the fourth dimensions “two-way asymmetrical”.

5.2 Location

This study is planned for the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The pilot study was conducted during three (3) day annual general meetings organized by Nigeria Institute of Public Relations. This is the highest body of public relations in Nigeria charged with the responsibility of licensing qualified PR practitioners in the country. But the main field work of the study is limited to the North-Western part of Nigeria. However, only PR practitioners form the respondents of this study.

5.3 Pilot Study

In the pilot study, one hundred and twenty (120) sets of Questionnaires were shared and ninety (90) were returned and found suitable for analysis. However, in the field study, six hundred copies of the questionnaire were shared and four hundred and thirty three (433) were found suitable for analysis. Crombach's Alpha analysis was conducted to check for the reliability of the instrument. As can be seen in Table 1 all the dimensions are found reliable.

Table: Reliability Test of All Dimensions Using Crombach's Alpha

	Pilot Study	Field Study
Professionals as Reference	0.87	0.88
Belief in Public Service	0.89	0.87
Self-regulation	0.90	0.87
Sense of calling	0.81	0.84
Autonomy	0.80	0.84
Competencies	0.91	0.92
Publicity Self-efficacy	0.88	0.82
Persuasion Self-efficacy	0.80	0.75
Two-way Asymmetrical	0.82	0.81
Two-way symmetrical	0.83	0.82
African Dialogic Self-efficacy	0.87	0.83
Personal Influence Model Self-efficacy	0.77	0.83

6. Conclusion/Implication

The essence of this work is to find out the predictive capacity of attitudinal professionalism and competencies on PR self-efficacy. The research has shown that attitudinal professionalism is very important to the development of PR, but eventual they found to be moderately attitudinal professionals. On the relationship, attitudinal professionalism was found to have predictive power on their self-efficacy. Another major conclusion of this study is the relevance of behavioral professionalism or simply called competencies. Practitioners are found to have moderate competencies, they may not be very serious about leaning competencies or they have no good opportunities to learn. However, on the relationship part, their competencies is found to predict their self-efficacy. The importance of focusing on self-efficacy cannot be over-emphasized. As has been explicated in the review part of this paper, self-efficacy has been confirmed to boost employees' performance. In the final study, our conceptualization which claimed the predictive power of attitude and competencies have been proven.

This study has implications. Firstly, PR self-efficacy dimensions are conceptualized. Conceptualizing PR self-efficacy dimension which is not commonly found contribute to theory building. On the methodology, structural equation modeling using AMOS has been found very useful in validating the reliability of the measurement. The items used are confirmed to measure the three constructs. Secondly, studying attitudinal professionalism reports PR critical and unsettled issues across countries such as PR and compulsory association, PR and practitioners level of autonomy etc. Thirdly, learning competencies is continuous in nature. Competencies are fast dynamic and fast changing. Appraising the need for learning more competencies would go a long way in encouraging PR practitioners to learn more skills and personal attributes which effectively among other thing qualify them as strategists at the managerial level.

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