South Sight: Journal of Media and Society Inquiry
2025, Volume 1, Issue 1, pp. 48-61
DOI: 10.14710/southsight.202526081

Research Article

Assessment of National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's Public Relations Strategies Against Substance Usage Among Youths in Oyo State, Nigeria

Tolulope Ayobami Ajayi-Ayodele and Adebowale Ikuesewo-Akinbami

Department of Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria
Correspondence: Tolulope Ayobami Ajayi-Ayodele (tolulope.ajayi@aaua.edu.ng)

Submitted: 23 February 2025**, Revised:** 25 April 2025**, Accepted:** 26 April 2025**, Published:** 30 April 2025

Abstract
This study investigated Public Relations (PR) strategies used by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in the campaign against substance usage and sought to determine the knowledge of youths about the harm associated with drug usage among the youthful population in Oyo state. The study hinged on the Public Relations Transfer Model and employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative survey and qualitative In-depth Interviews, utilizing a structured questionnaire and interview guide as data collection instruments. The population of the study includes youths residing in Oyo, and six (6) NDLEA officials selected from the NDLEA branch office in Oyo state. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to select 384 respondents through the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, while a purposive sampling technique was adopted to select NDLEA officials in Oyo state. The findings of this study revealed that the NDLEA perceived PR strategies in the form of media partnership and community engagement in the campaign as the major PR approaches against substance use in Oyo state, while the respondents (Oyo youths) perceived that social media (bloggers, influencers, celebrities) as the topmost PR strategy for illicit substance use they are knowledgeable about. Also, findings showed that campaigns through enlightenment against substance use were effective, but stimulating positive behavior changes was not achieved because the respondents perceived that the PR strategies were not highly effective in the containment of substance use. Therefore, continual use of the PR strategies currently adopted by NDLEA combined with other conventional strategies is recommended.

Keywords: Public relations strategies, substance abuse, Nigerian youths, NDLEA, assessment

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse has become a pervasive and devastating issue, affecting millions of young lives worldwide, regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, or demographics, and posing a significant threat to global health, wellbeing, and productivity (UNODC, 2010; Okafar, 2020). In 2021, a total of 270 million people (about 5.5% of the world's population) were estimated to be using substances globally. Three years later, on 26 June 2024, the UNODC released a World drug report that the figure had increased to 292 million in 2022, a 20 percent increase in 10 years, and that cannabis is still the most widely used drug in the world, followed by opiates, amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy (UNODC, 2024). In Nigeria, approximately 143 million are reportedly involved in drug abuse (UNODC, 2022). Globally, not less than 35 million people are currently being affected by drug use disorders, with 0.5million deaths as a result of abnormal drug use (UNODC, 2021).

A substance refers to any drug that could change biological function through chemical actions (Okoye, 2001). It is referred to Drugs are substances that alter mental processes, thoughts, attitudes, behavior, and wellbeing, often prescribed to treat pain, discomfort, and ailments, and commonly used in society (Okafor, 2020). They are also referred to as chemical modifiers of perceptions, mood, cognition, and general body function that could bring about physiological and behavioral changes (Balogun, 2006; Nnachi, 2007). Substances such as Marijuana, Cocaine, Heroin, Opium, Nicotine, etc are all classified drugs. Substance abuse, also called drug/chemical abuse, is a disorder that is

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
ISSN: 3109-8460 (Online). Website: https://ejournal2.undip.ac.id/index.php/southsight

characterized by a destructive consequence of using illicit substances, which leads to significant problems or mental distress. World Health Organisation (WHO) defined drug abuse as "a state of psychic or physical dependence or both on a drug, following administration of the drug on a periodic or continuous basis."

As of 2018, drug users represented approximately 0.9% of the world's population (Ritchie et al, 2018). There are now three times more drug abuse use in Nigeria, especially among the youths, when compared to the international prevalence of substance use. In 2018, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated a total number of 14.3 million drug users in Nigeria, with 3 million Nigerians suffering from drug use disorders and the end of the 20th century, the United Nations reported that around 185 million people over the age of 15 were consuming drugs globally. In Nigeria, 1 in 7 between the age of 15-64 years are drug abusers, 1 in 4 drug abusers are women, and 1 in 5 drug users suffer from the consequences of the drugs. Data from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) showed that all categories of illicit drugs are widely abused in all the states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (UNODC, 2024).

The escalating drug abuse crisis among Nigerian youths has become a major public health concern, leading to severe mental health consequences, social problems, and educational disruptions (Funmilayo, 2019; Raimi, 2019). Substance use has severe health consequences, including cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer, seizures, strokes, migraines, and cardiac failure. Additionally, users may experience anxiety, mood swings, and various obstetric complications, such as spontaneous abortions, placental abruption, birth defects, delayed fetal growth, and premature births (Nyaga et al., 2019; National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). Prolonged drug use can lead to debilitating health issues, including headaches, persistent hoarseness, nervousness, depression, insomnia, and unexplained nasal bleeding. Moreover, it can result in various related diseases and even premature death. Alarmingly, approximately 11.8 million deaths worldwide each year are attributed to the use of opioids, cocaine, amphetamines, and other illicit substances (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). According to the World Health Organisation (2019), a staggering 2.6 million youths aged 10-24 lose their lives annually due to substance abuse.

Nigeria's youthful population, with approximately 60% of citizens below 30, is vulnerable to substance abuse, posing a significant threat to the country's future economic growth and development (United Nations Population Fund, 2022). The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), established by Decree No. 48 of January 1989 (Otu, 2013) with the mandate to combat drug trafficking in Nigeria, has expressed concerns over the high rate of drug abuse among youths, highlighting the need for urgent attention to address this issue and its far-reaching consequences on health, social stability, and economic development. The large quantity of drugs seized by the NDLEA at Nigerian airports in recent years highlights the alarming rate at which young Nigerians are being targeted and exploited by drug traffickers, underscoring the urgent need for effective interventions to protect this vulnerable demographic. Hence, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 3, Target 3.5, aims to strengthen prevention and treatment efforts for substance abuse, including drug addiction and harmful alcohol consumption.

To address this challenge, a multifaceted approach is needed, encompassing education, prevention programs, economic empowerment, healthcare, and law enforcement to mitigate the risks and unlock the potential of Nigeria's youth. Amongst the several interventions available, one key approach to combat substance use is the urgent need for the adoption of effective public relations strategies among youths in Oyo State, one of the states with prevalent abuse of substances in Nigeria (UNODC, 2023). With only a few years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, statistics on the prevalence of substance use revealed that Nigeria still faces a critical

challenge in addressing substance abuse. Therefore, there is a need to put into place PR strategies that will drive behavioral change in relation to substance abuse, thus the need for this study.

Despite efforts by regulatory bodies, drug abuse persists, as evident in Oyo state where Oyo state command of the NDLEA recently arrested 546 illicit drug consumers, seized 10,4440.534 kilograms of illegal drugs, with the command rehabilitating 18 individuals and provided counseling for 144 others in 2024 (Onuegbu, 2023). Notably, the southern regions of Nigeria, particularly in Lagos and Oyo state, exhibit a higher prevalence rate of illicit substance use compared to the northern regions (UNODC, 2023).

Illicit substance use substantially threatens social security, family stability, and national development (Akimpelu, 2021; Saladino et al., 2021). Law enforcement agencies, such as the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), have made efforts to curtail it. However, innovative public relations strategies are necessary to address this issue to target vulnerable populations that can help alleviate the burden on healthcare systems and foster more resilient individuals and families. Past Nigerian studies on substance abuse have been conducted among adolescents and youths in secondary schools and higher institutions, focusing on the effects of drugs effects on their academic performances (such as Ogunsola et al., 2017; Idowu et al., 2018). However, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's (NDLEA) public relations (PR) approaches in raising awareness about the harms associated with substance use and promoting attitudinal change among Nigerian youths is limited and understudied in the existing literature. Therefore, this current study seeks to address the existing knowledge gap by investigating the use and perceived effectiveness of NDLEA's public relations strategies in combating substance abuse among youths in Oyo State, Nigeria.

1) To examine the public relations strategies used by NDLEA in the campaign against substance abuse in Oyo state.
2) To determine the public knowledge of Public Relations strategies used by NDLEA to combat substance use among youths in Oyo State
3) To investigate the extent to which the youths are knowledgeable about the dangers of substance abuse through the public relations strategies employed by NDLEA.
4) To examine the perceived effectiveness of the use of public relations strategies employed by NDLEA in the containment of substance use among youths in Oyo State

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Public Relations

According to The International Public Relations Association (IPRA), Public Relations is ' the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will benefit the organization and also serve public interests (Nwosu, 2001). Public Relations is also definitely "the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends (Nwosu et Al. 1985, cited in Odigbo, 2000: 13). Similarly, Nwosu (1996) cited in (Belch & Belch, 2001) defined Public Relations as management function that evaluates people's attitude, identifies the policies and procedures of organization with the public interest and executes a program of action (and communication) to earn public understanding and acceptance.

For effective institutional goal attainment, public relations practitioner and the management of the institutions need to understand the attitudes and values of their publics. The public relations practitioner acts as a mediator and counselor to management by helping to translate policy and action (Osuji, 1990, cited in Okolo et al., 2017). Public relations are not communicating promises

alone. It is based on the organization's practices, performances, good deeds, and past records. No amount of good public relations will generate acceptance or patronage for an organization with a bad image or that is not responsive to the public interest. The fundamental purpose of public relations practice is to establish a two-way mutual understanding based on truth, knowledge, and information in various institutions. Public Relations activities function in a variety of institutions in society, such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, and educational and religious institutions. These institutions must develop effective relationships with the public, such as employees, customers, local communities, shareholders, and other institutions, and with the society at large to achieve their institutional goals.

According to the NDLEA (2008), drug abuse is defined as the non-medical use of drugs, including use without a prescription, in excess, or for purposes other than intended, and is often socially unacceptable and illegal. Drugs are substances that alter perceptions, cognition, mood, behavior, and overall bodily functions (Balogun, 2016). Substance misuse is a significant and pervasive global health issue (UNODC, 2021), however. Prevalence and patterns of drug addiction in a given society are shaped by the cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes towards drug use that are prevalent in that society.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) was established by Decree 48 of January 1990 to eradicate the use of hard and illicit drugs in the country. NDLEA was created to enforce laws against the cultivation, processing, sale, and use of hard drugs. The Agency has special duties for specific units, such as the Drug Demand Reduction Unit, which is saddled with the responsibility of counseling, campaign against drug abuse, aftercare rehabilitation, social reintegration, and enlightenment of the public on the dangers of drug abuse. Some of the widely abused drugs are cough syrup, cigarettes, inhalants, cannabis, and alcohol (Nelson, 2018). It was a known phenomenon that in those days, the commonest illicit drugs widely taken were marijuana, heroin, and cocaine (Nelson, 2018). However, things have changed; youth have gone to the extent of abusing new substances "that would cause similar or even more sensational effects as conventional narcotics.

Drug Abuse is the excessive, maladaptive use of drugs for non-medical purposes despite social, psychological, and physical problems that may arise from such use (Abdulahi, 2009). It is seen as the persistent or even sporadic excessive use of drugs not conforming with or unrelated to accepted medical practice. People are taking drugs in order to feel better in the course of discharging their day-to-day activities and also due to the situations they might have found themselves in (Sambo, 2009). Abdulahi (2009) viewed drug abuse as the use of drugs to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. It can also be viewed as an unlawful overdose in the use of drug(s). According to Kumar and Dangi (2019), people often misuse drugs to cope with stress, feel pleasure, or escape reality, and when they cannot stop, addiction sets in. Substances many Nigerian youths rely on include Indian hemp, tobacco, cocaine, heroin, morphine, barbiturates, alcohol, amphetamines, caffeine, glue, and madras to cope with daily activities, such as education, socializing, politics, and moral issues (Nwakego et al., 2024).

Substance abuse, especially among youths and young adults, constitutes a silent epidemic and a significant public health issue. It facilitates the spread of diseases like AIDS, fosters criminal activity, and tragically claims the lives of young people worldwide, jeopardizing future generations. In line with this, Odigbo (2000) outlines the dangers of hard drugs to the world as follows:

- **Destruction of Lives:** Drugs are claiming the lives of many of our youths. The global village is on the verge of becoming a communal tomb for millions as the illicit drug trade continues to claim the lives of countless youths.
- **Dangers to Un-Born Babies:** The devastating impact of drugs extends even to unborn babies, who can suffer from painful withdrawal symptoms and even death due to prenatal exposure.

Furthermore, drug exposure in the womb can lead to long-lasting and debilitating physical and mental health consequences for the newborn.

- **Increase in HIV/AIDS Cases:** A United Nations report by UNAIDS (2008) revealed that a significant percentage of the world's HIV-positive population are injecting drug users who contracted the virus through sharing infected needles.
- **Social Nuisance**: Drug addiction poses significant social risks, contributing to various forms of maladjustment. This includes reckless driving, lawlessness, domestic violence, and disruption of parent-child relationships, ultimately threatening social cohesion and stability.
- **Increase in Crime Waves:** Drug addiction is often linked to criminal activity, with users turning to crime or prostitution to support their habits, while rival groups engage in violent conflicts to control drug distribution, contributing to a significant proportion of murders investigated by law enforcement.

The public relations approach is essential for effectively disseminating messages, driving behavioral change, and increasing awareness among the public. Effective public relations are crucial in capturing the target audience's attention and influencing their opinions and decisions. Public relations' multifaceted nature necessitates using suitable media and tools to effectively communicate with various stakeholders. Organizations must carefully select the most appropriate approach with numerous public relations strategies available, each with its unique package and cost implications. The relevant public relations strategies that law enforcement agencies can employ are discussed as follows:

- **Mass Media-** Mass media refers to the means of communication through which messages are relayed or conveyed to a large group of people known as the audience (Okolo et al., 2017). Mass media encompass various communication channels that disseminate messages to a vast audience, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards. As a powerful tool for publicity, public enlightenment, and awareness creation, mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing behavior. It is important to note that the mass media is indispensable in any communication program involving public relations (Okolo et al., 2017). Without the mass media, communication efforts will, at most, secure limited publicity or none at all. In this modern day and age, the mass media plays a pivotal role in reaching an organization's public virtually and at a lesser cost. In the context of public relations, mass media can be leveraged as a marketing communications strategy to address social issues, such as eradicating substance use among youths in Oyo State, Nigeria.
- **Traditional media communication (Folk Media)-** Folk media, encompassing traditional forms such as theatre, stories, songs, dances, chants, and folktales, remain a vibrant and effective means of communication, particularly at the grassroots level. Despite the rise of modern media, folk media continue to thrive, rooted in local communities' cultural heritage and values. Characterized by their widespread availability, accessibility, and affordability, folk media offer a diverse and sustainable platform for conveying important messages, including those related to drug awareness and education.
- **Seminars**- Seminars have emerged as a valuable tool in educational public relations, offering a platform to communicate important information to the public. These events aim to educate, inform, or influence a target audience on various issues, such as product benefits, usage, or pricing. Seminars can also address negative attitudes or behaviors, promoting positive change (Geçikli, 2014). Seminar featuring expert speakers provides a unique opportunity for

engagement and learning. A key advantage is the captive audience, which is more likely to be receptive to the discussion. Public relations experts often leverage seminars to address critical issues affecting their organizations, making them an effective communication strategy (Geçikli, 2014).

- **Interpersonal Communication-** Interpersonal communication entails interaction between persons in some kind of relationship. It can take place face-to-face, through electronic channels (e-mail or instant messaging, for example) or even in traditional letter writing. To discourage the use of substances among Nigerian youths, NDLEA adopts face-to-face interaction with the youths, encouraging them to stop the use of substances as well as stating the consequences of not doing so. This will enable first-hand information and the exchange of ideas between the initiator and the youth and create a platform for the people to directly lay their fairs and complaints to NDLEA. Town criers are used for interpersonal communication with opinion leaders in the form of interpreters who assist in breaking down words that are difficult to absorb in the local dialect of the Oyo community.
- P**ress Releases-** Mainstream media coverage, such as press releases featured on TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines, tends to be more effective than advertising due to its perceived trustworthiness and credibility, making press releases a timeless and powerful public relations tool adopted by NDLEA.
- **Community Relations-** Community relations involve building trust between an organization and the local community through targeted initiatives. These efforts may include partnering with local organizations, hosting educational workshops, donating products to community events, and supporting charity fundraisers. The ultimate goal is to foster a positive and mutually beneficial relationship with community members.
- **Press Conferences**- A press conference is a vital and effective tool in the public relations arsenal (Ioana & Bogdan, 2015). Although organizations and corporations have underutilized press conferences, politicians have long recognized their value as a powerful means of delivering targeted public relations messages to key audiences (Belch and Belch, 2001, cited in Okolo et al., 2017). Press conferences are usually organized on short notice in response to pressing issues likely to generate significant media interest. The spokesperson of NDLEA can use this avenue to disseminate information about the effects of substance use to the public.
- **Documentary Films**- Documentary films are a powerful tool organizations use to educate, enlighten, and influence audiences about specific issues, company activities, or industries. These films effectively change people's attitudes and behaviors (Mirana & Mirana, 2016), making them a valuable component of public relations and communication strategies. A documentary showcasing the devastating consequences of drug abuse, featuring real-life stories of individuals whose lives have been ravaged by drugs, can have a profound and lasting impact on young minds. This type of documentary can be more effective in changing attitudes than traditional advertising methods, as it presents a raw and unvarnished portrayal of the harsh realities of drug addiction.

Empirical Review

Nwakego et al. (2024) study examined the effectiveness of the ABS Radio Programme "NDLEA and You" in creating awareness about drug abuse and drug-related crimes among Awka residents. The study was grounded in the Agenda Setting theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action, positing

that ABS radio can shape public perception and influence positive behavioral change among Awka residents. The results showed that while many residents were exposed to the program, it did not reduce the rate of drug and substance abuse. The study concluded that drug abuse has severe consequences for the nation's health, particularly among youths, and that media organizations like ABS Radio have a critical role in combating drug abuse. Recommendations included intensifying public awareness campaigns through various community-based initiatives.

A study by Okoye et al. (2022) investigated the effectiveness of mass media in combating drug abuse among undergraduates in Imo State, Nigeria. The study, grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action, found that despite moderate awareness of mass media campaigns, respondents believed that these efforts had not been effective in reducing drug abuse. The study concluded that mass media campaigns were ineffective in curbing drug abuse among undergraduates and recommended intensified publicity, creative content, and persuasive communication to raise public awareness and positively influence youths. This study's findings and recommendations differ from those of a similar study conducted among Awka residents in Anambra State.

Ude-Akpeh's (2017) study evaluated the influence of the NDLEA radio campaign on drug abuse among youths in Onitsha Metropolis. The study employed a survey research method to collect and analyze data from youths in the Onitsha metropolis who were potential or actual users of banned drugs. A purposive sampling method was utilized to select participants, addressing sample size and allocation concerns within the study area. The study found that while the campaign created awareness and provided knowledge about the implications of drug abuse, it was ineffective in reducing incidents of drug abuse among youths. The study recommended further investigation into the impact of presentation style and program redundancy on the effectiveness of radio campaigns.

A study by Chinelo (2017) evaluated the impact of the NDLEA radio campaign on drug abuse among youths in the Onitsha metropolis. Using a survey research method and purposive sampling, the study found that the radio campaign was ineffective in influencing drug abuse among youths. The study recommends improving the radio programs to better address the issue of drug abuse among young people. Existing literature reveals that despite various media campaigns and messages about drug abuse, the desired behavioral change among people has not been achieved. However, previous studies have not focused on examining the effectiveness of the use of public relations strategies to combat the prevalence of substance use among Nigerian youths. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the effectiveness of the PR approaches by NDLEA in raising awareness and combating the prevalence of substance use and drug-related crimes among residents in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Public Relations Transfer Model as propounded by Frank Jenkins in 1988. In 1988. Jefkins Frank Jefkins, a renowned United Kingdom-based public relations practitioner, identified limitations in existing public relations models in 1987. He conducted further research, leading to the development of the Public Relations Transfer Process Model in 1988, which is widely recognized for its effectiveness. According to him, the Transfer Process Model illustrates the transformative power of public relations in addressing complex, negative, and disturbing situations and bringing about positive change. Jefkins (1988) emphasizes that public relations practitioners have a crucial role in utilizing effective communication methods, techniques, and strategies to shift public attitudes from negativity to positivity, specifically from hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest, and ignorance to knowledge.

The Transfer Process Model is highly relevant to this study (Figure 1), highlighting the importance of persistent and effective communication in achieving societal goals, such as reducing illicit drug

use. The model emphasizes that public relations play a crucial role in educating and informing the public, beyond just advertising, to break down barriers of ignorance and promote positive change. The Transfer Process Model demonstrates the power of public relations in transforming negative attitudes into positive ones, specifically in the context of substance use. By applying its principles, PR practitioners can shift public perception from prejudice to acceptance, ignorance to knowledge, and apathy to interest, ultimately supporting efforts to combat illicit substance use.

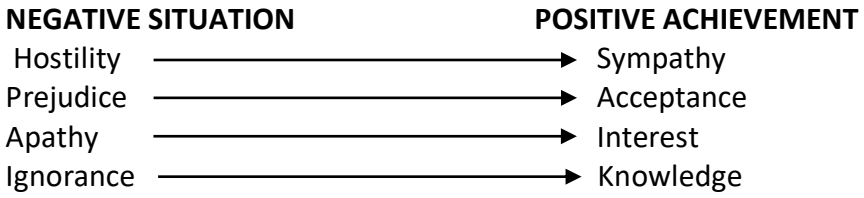

Figure 1. Public Relations Transfer Model
Source: Jefkins F. (1988)

METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey and qualitative In-depth Interviews, utilizing structured questionnaires and interview guides as data collection instruments. A survey method was used to obtain data from youths in Oyo state on knowledge about substance abuse, the available PR strategies in creating awareness about the ills of substance use, and the effects of PR strategies in the containment of substance abuse, while the In-depth Interview allowed the researcher to elicit information from six (6) government agency responsible for drug control (NDLEA). Therefore, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to select three Chief Narcotic Agents (CNA) and three Senior Narcotic Agents in the NDLEA office in Oyo state who were interviewed for the study. The population of the study is residents of Oyo state, South West, focusing only on the youths based in Nigeria's South-West region, being identified as the second highest 23% prevalence rate of illicit substance use, translating to approximately 4,382,000 (22.4%) users, (UNODC, 2018).

The population of this study comprises 7,976,100 residents of Oyo State (City population, 2022). The youths included in the study were those between the ages of 15-25 years. The study was conducted in Oyo state, a state in the southern region of Nigeria, because it has a higher prevalence rate of illicit substance use than the northern regions (UNODC, 2023). The sample size for the survey was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table (1970). According to this table, for a population of 1 million or more, a sample size of 384 is recommended, which was adopted for this study.

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to select the respondents. First, using a stratified sampling technique, the state was divided into three Senatorial Districts: Oy:o North, Oyo Central, and Oyo South. A simple Random Sampling technique was used to select one local government (LGA) from each zone, namely Irepo, Egbeda, and Ibadan North, respectively. Three wards were randomly selected for the study in each of the three (3) selected LGAs. In Irepo, the wards selected were Atipa, Agoro, and Ikolaba; in Egbeda LGA, the wards selected were Olodo II, Erunmu, and Olubadan Estate; and in Ibadan North, the chosen wards were Idi-Agba, Ifeleye, and Adeosun. A purposive sample technique was adopted to select only youths who are exposed to public relations strategies meant to contain the use of substances in the selected wards in Oyo state. For the qualitative approach, data collected were transcribed, coded according to relevant themes, and descriptively analyzed in relation to the research questions. Out of 384 copies of the questionnaire

administered to respondents of Oyo State, only 376 (92%) were returned and found useable. Therefore, only 376 copies of the questionnaire were used for the purpose of data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective sought to examine the public relations strategies used by NDLEA in the campaign against substance abuse in Oyo state.

Our mandate aims to combat drug abuse by simultaneously reducing the supply of illicit drugs and decreasing demand through prevention and education efforts. While we seize drugs and arrest offenders, we also educate the public about the inherent dangers and consequences. We partner with media outlets to publish articles, broadcast messages, and produce documentaries about the dangers of drug abuse (NDLEA Chief Narcotic Agent 3). Social media platforms are vital tools to share messages, videos, and personal stories about the risks of drug abuse. We utilize a multi-channel approach to reach our target audience, combining traditional methods like public lectures, material distribution, and counseling with digital outreach through social media platforms (NDLEA Senior Narcotic Agent 2).

We collaborate with media outlets to host events, conferences, and workshops focused on drug abuse prevention. We also share content and messages with online news platforms, blogs, and social media influencers. Through our strategic partnerships with media outlets, we amplify our impact by securing media coverage of our community outreach initiatives. This coverage showcases our efforts to engage with individuals in substance-affected communities, promoting awareness and encouraging them to seek help and cease drug use (NDLEA Chief Narcotic Agent 2). Our Agency conducts community outreach programs periodically, engaging with individuals who are into substance use to deliver a harm reduction message: encouraging cessation of drug use and promoting safe injection practices for those who cannot quit immediately (NDLEA Chief Narcotic Agents 1). We organize seminars and street campaigns, leveraging trained community members who are substance abusers to educate their peers about the dangers of drug abuse and misuse to promote harm reduction and healthy behaviors (NDLEA Senior Narcotic Agent 1).

The results demonstrate that the NDLEA effectively sensitizes the public through strategic media communication channels and community engagement initiatives. By partnering with media outlets, the NDLEA amplifies its educational programs on drug abuse prevention while also focusing on community-based interventions that educate drug users and encourage cessation of drug use.

Table 1. Knowledge of PR strategies to combat substance use

PR strategies used to combat substance use	Irepo	Egbeda	Ibadan North	Frequency	Percentage
Print(Newspapers, Leaflets/Fliers/Posters)	8	14	11	33	8.7%
Broadcast (Television/radio)	23	14	27	64	17%
Social media (bloggers, influencers, celebrities)	59	58	56	173	46%
Community engagement	36	29	29	94	25%
Indigenous communication, e.g., Town criers, mouth-to-mouth campaign	00	10	02	12	3.1%
Press releases/conferences	00	00	00	00	0%
Total	126	125	125	376	100%

Source: Data processed by Authors, 2024

The second objective was to determine the public knowledge of Public Relations strategies used by NDLEA to combat substance use among youths in Oyo State. Results are presented in Table 1. The findings in Table 1 revealed the public knowledge of the several public relations strategies employed by the NDLEA on drug abuse. The result showed that most respondents (173 representing 46%) agreed that social media (bloggers, influencers, celebrities) are the topmost PR strategy they know

about, with 59 responses from Irepo, 58 from Egbeda, and 56 from Ibadan North. Next, the PR strategy the respondents were aware of was community engagement by NDLEA (94, 25%), followed by television and radio media with 64 (17%). At the bottom is the social media with 33 (11%). Findings indicated that the youths in Oyo state are knowledgeable about different PR strategies employed by NDLEA to combat illicit substance use.

The third objective is to investigate the extent to which the youths are knowledgeable about the dangers of substance abuse through the public relations strategies employed by NDLEA. As shown in Table 2, findings showed that the respondents, to a great extent, are knowledgeable about the perceived dangers of substance abuse through the adopted PR strategies but the NDLEA. The majority of the respondents 327 (185+142), representing 85.3%, agreed that they were aware that substance use leads to engaging in criminal activities to a great extent and great extent respectively 320 (146+174), representing 84.5% agreed that they were knowledgeable about the substance use leads to death to a great extent and great extent respectively, while 313 (133+180) representing 83.5% agreed that they were aware that substance use leads to dropping out of school to a great extent and great extent respectively. The implication of this is that the adopted PR strategies by NDLEA have been effective enough to create awareness about substance use.

Table 2. The extent to which youths are knowledgeable about perceived dangers of substance Abuse through the adopted PR Strategies

Questions	Very Great Extent	Great Extent	Little Extent	Very Little Extent	No Extent	Total
Mental problem	130 (34.6%)	162 (42.7%)	55 (14.7%)	20 (5.5%)	5 (1.6%)	376 (100%)
Violent Behaviour	101 (26.7%)	174 (45.8%)	55 (14.7%)	26 (7.1%)	17 (4.7%)	376 (100%)
Death	146 (38.5%)	174 (46.1%)	30 (8.1%)	17 (4.7%)	5 (1.6%)	376 (100%)
Lack of Concentration	93 (24.9%)	133 (35.3%)	99 (26.2%)	32 (8.6%)	15 (3.9%)	376 (100%)
School Drop Out	133 (35.3%)	180 (48.7%)	23 (6.3%)	21 (5.1%)	5 (1.6%)	376 (100%)
Sexual Violence	133 (35.3%)	159 (41.9%)	40 (10.7%)	34 (9.4%)	6 (1.7%)	376 (100%)
Criminal Activities	185 (47.7%)	142 (37.6%)	17 (4.7%)	23 (6.3%)	4 (1.0%)	376 (100%)

Source: Data processed by Authors, 2024

Table 3. Perceived Effectiveness of PR Strategies for the Containment of Substance Abuse

Responses	Yes	No	Unsure	Total/Percentage
My exposure to PR strategic messages has shaped my knowledge of the dangers of substance use	256(67.8%)	99 (26.3%)	21 (5.5%)	376 (100%)
There is a positive relationship between the adoption of public relations strategies and the containment of drug abuse	102 (27.1%)	214 (56.9%)	60 (15%)	376 (100%)
My exposure to PR Strategic messages is very effective in dishing out information about drug abuse	240 (63.8%)	91 (24.2%)	45(11.9%)	376 (100%)
Public relations messages in the media on the ills of drug use have contributed to my change in the use of substances	90 (23.9%)	258 (76%)	28 (7.4%)	376 (100%)
Public relations strategic messages have helped in containing my use of substance	56 (14.8%)	275(73.1%)	45(11.9%)	376 (100%)

Source: Data processed by Authors, 2024

The fourth objective is to examine the perceived effectiveness of the use of public relations strategies employed by NDLEA in the containment of substance use among youths in Oyo State. As shown in Table 3, findings showed that the majority of the respondents (256, representing 67.8%)

agreed that their exposure to PR strategic messages has shaped their knowledge of substance use. However, most of the respondents (258, representing 76%) indicated that PR messages did not contribute to their change in the use of substances. Also, a total of 275, representing 73.1%, disagreed that PR strategic messages have helped in containing their use of substance. This presentation implies that although the majority of the respondents agreed that the use of PR media, tactics, and strategies helped enlighten them on the dangers of substance use, a significant number of the respondents agreed that these strategic messages did not help contain their use of substance.

In an in-depth interview with one of the NDLEA on the perceived effectiveness of PR strategies used by them, the Senior Narcotic Agent 2 said:

> *The tide is turning in the fight against drug abuse. As people become increasingly aware of the devastating consequences, drug abuse is being recognized as a pandemic that warrants a state of emergency. It's time for collective action to combat this scourge and create a safer, healthier world.*

NDLEA Chief Narcotic Agent 2 added:

> *The PR strategic intervention of NDLEA is graduating, reducing the incidence of drug abuse in Kano State. A large number of drug dependents have been counseled and discharged, with over fifty percent refraining from the deadly act totally.*

In another interviewee's opinion, NDLEA Senior Narcotic Agent 1 said:

> *The intervention has not really been effective. Although we have succeeded in making a good number of them aware of the dangers of the illicit use of substances, abstaining from their use is not a day's job.*

NDLEA Chief Narcotic Agent 1 also said:

> Despite progress in raising awareness about the dangers of substance abuse, our intervention has faced challenges in achieving lasting behavior change. Recognizing the complexity of addiction, we acknowledge that overcoming substance abuse is a long-term process that requires ongoing support and commitment.

Discussion

This study sought to find out the public relations strategies used by NDLEA in the campaign against substance use in Oyo state. The findings from the first objective indicated that the NDLEA engages in different PR strategies. However, the major PR approaches adopted by NDLEA are media partnership and community engagement. By partnering with media outlets, the NDLEA amplifies its educational programs on drug abuse prevention while also focusing on community-based interventions that educate drug users and encourage cessation of drug use. The findings established the PR strategies NDLEA used in the campaign against.

Another objective of the study was to determine the public knowledge of public relations strategies used by NDLEA to combat substance use among youths in Oyo State. Findings also revealed that Public Relations strategies by NDLEA had a positive impact on creating awareness of the dangers of substance use. According to respondents, exposure to PR's different media, tactics, and strategies has shaped their awareness about the dangers of drug abuse, such as mental problems, violent Behaviour, death, lack of Concentration, School Dropout, Sexual Violence, criminal Activities, and so on. Illicit substance use and abuse in Oyo state have succeeded in promoting the dangers associated with substance use. Therefore, understanding the health implications of illicit substance use and its potential harm to the safety and development of society among Oto youths is an important first step to effectively target such interventions.

Findings revealed that the youths in Oyo state are exposed to PR strategies employed by NDLEA to disseminate information to them. The study revealed that many respondents agreed that social media (bloggers, influencers, celebrities) are the topmost PR strategy they know about. This means that the majority of the youth agreed that they get most of their information on substance use and abuse on the social media platforms the most. The NDLEA's preference for social media as a primary channel for communicating PR strategies is likely due to the fact that social media platforms are predominantly used by young adults, the demographic most vulnerable to substance abuse. By leveraging social media, the NDLEA can effectively reach and engage with its target audience, promoting awareness and education about the dangers of substance use.". Therefore, for effective means of disseminating information about substance abuse, NDLEA should maximize the potential of social media to reach the youth since they are the ones who mostly use the substances.

It is therefore important to explore the reasons behind the use of substances, especially among youths in Oyo state. Understanding the motives behind the mitigation of substance use is very important at various Community levels. Despite PR strategies, it is also important to influence adequate attitudinal and behavioral change. This is where the PR transfer model used in this study becomes inevitable, to change every community hostility against substance use free community status to sympathy, change every prejudice beclouding the process of acceptance, change apathy to interest, and create adequate awareness that will change every form of ignorance to knowledge on the dangers of substance use.

The study also discovered that respondents strongly agreed that PR strategies are not highly effective in the containment of substance abuse among youths. Also, the study revealed that there is no significant positive relationship between the use of Public Relations strategies and the containment of substance abuse among youths in Oyo state. It, therefore, means that public relations campaigns have not significantly influenced behavioral change in the containment of substance use among youths in Oyo state. This goes in line with the UNODC (2024) document, which shows that there is an increase in the prevalence rate of illicit substance use in the state; it suffices to say that the PR strategies have not yielded success in preventing illicit drug use among youths in Oyo state.

CONCLUSION

This study established that media partnership and community outreach/engagement are the major public relations strategies used by NDLEA in the campaign against substance use in Oyo state. Also, effective and efficient public relations practice is crucial for promoting cooperation among the various stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies like NDLEA and the government, in containing substance use among youths in Nigeria. Based on the findings above, the study concludes that public relations strategies succeeded in creating awareness about the dangers of substance abuse; however, has not been very effective in the containment of drug abuse among youths in Oyo State. The majority of the respondents had prior awareness and knowledge of harm related to substance use before engaging in the act. Findings also revealed that the adoption of social media platforms for communicating with the youths about substance abuse is the most effective channel of communication for enlightenment about the dangers of substance use.

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommends that there should be 1) adequate funding of NDLEA for large-scale preventive intervention campaigns, rehabilitation, and treatment of persons who use illicit drugs; 2) more preventive campaigns on drug abuse with a highlight on substance use and their consequences; 3) effective and efficient public relations practices which is crucial for promoting cooperation among the various stakeholders such as regulatory bodies like NDLEA and the government in containing substance use among youths in Nigeria; and 4) continual use of currently adopted PR strategies by NDLEA combined with other conventional should be

adopted and in addition, messages against substance use should be aggressively packaged on social media to achieve better results since the youths predominantly use social media platforms to achieve more positive results.

Author Contribution

All author declares having an equal contribution. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data is available by request to the author.

REFERENCES

Abdulahi, Z. (2009). Drug abuse among youths: Strategies for school counseling. *The Nigerian society of educational psychologists*, *7*, 131–136.

Akinpelu, I. L. (2021). Drug Abuse, Youths and National Security Implications for Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, *5*(12), 238-244.

Balogun, S. K. (2006). Chronic intake of separate and combined alcohol and nicotine on body maintenance among albino rats. *Journal of Human Ecology*, *19*(1), 21-24.

Belch, G. E., & Belch, M. A. (2018). *Advertising and promotion: An integrated marketing communications perspective*. McGraw-Hill.

Britannica (2025). *Drug Abuse*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/science/drug-abuse

City Population. (2022). Population statistics for countries, administrative divisions, cities, urban areas, and agglomerations – interactive maps and charts. Retrieved from www.citypopulation.de

Fawa, M. S. (2003). Drug abuse eradication program in schools: The relevance of team, approach alternative. *A. Garba (Ed) Youth and drug abuse in Nigeria: Strategies for counseling, management, and control*.

Funmilayo, A. A., Robert, O. T., Raimi, M. O., Okoyen, E., & Tuebi, M. (2019). A study of the context of adolescent substance use and patterns of use in yenagoa local government, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *MOJ Addict Med Ther*, *6*(1), 25–32.

Geçikli, F. (2014). The organization of public relations department at hospitals: A model suggestion. *International Journal of Business, Humanities, and Technology*, *4*(1), 51–59.

Idowu, A., Aremu, A. O., Olumide, A., & Ogunlaja, A. O. (2018). Substance abuse among students in selected secondary schools of an urban community of Oyo-state, South West Nigeria: implication for policy action. *African Health Sciences*, *18*(3), 776-785.

National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (2023). Federal Republic of Nigeria. 2016 Annual Report. Retrieved from: https://ndlea.gov.ng.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020). Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction and Health. Retrieved from https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brainsbehavior-science-addiction/addiction-health

Nelson, E. U. (2018). Police crackdowns, structural violence, and impact on the wellbeing of street cannabis users in a Nigerian city. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, *54*, 114–122.

Nelson, E. U. (2018). Police Crackdowns, Structural Violence, and impact on the wellbeing of Street

Nnachi, R. O. (2007). Advanced psychology of learning and scientific inquiries. *Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd*.

Nwakego, C. G., Godfrey, O. E., Emeka, O. C., & Ugonna, A. E. (2024). Effectiveness of ABS radio program NDLEA and you in creating awareness about drug abuse and drug-related crimes among Awka residents. *British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research*, (7) 3, 18-29.

Nwosu, I. E. (2001). Marketing Communication Management and Media: An Integrated Approach. *Lagos: Dominican Publishers*.

Nyaga, J., Mwaura, P., Mutundu, K., Njeru, D., Juma, G., & Were, T. (2021). Socioeconomic and health consequences of drugs and substance use in Gachie, a Peri-urban town on the outskirts of Nairobi. *African Journal of Alcohol & Drug Abuse*, 6, 67-80.

Odejide, A.O. (2000). Research, prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug abuse in Nigeria: Problem and prospects, Paper Presented at the 10th Anniversary Lecture of CRISA.Jos

Odigbo, B. (2000). Appraisal of Public Relations Techniques for Arresting Hard Drug Trafficking by Nigerians. Master Thesis, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.

Ogunsola, O. O., & Fatusi, A. O. (2017). Risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use: a comparative study of secondary school students in rural and urban areas of Osun State, Nigeria. *International journal of adolescent medicine and health*, *29*(3).

Okafor, I. P. (2020). Causes and consequences of drug abuse among youth in Kwara state, Nigeria. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse*, *12*(1), 147-162.

Okolo, V. O., Nebo, G. N., Ikechukwu, A., & Obikeze, C. O. (2017). Application of public relations as a marketing communications strategy towards the eradication of smoking and alcoholism among youths in Abia state-Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Finance and Marketing*, *7*(8), 7-28.

Olalekan, R. M., Funmilayo, A. A., Iteimowei, M., Okoyen, E., & Oyinlola, B. O. (2019). Public health impact of substance use on adolescent: A snapshot of Yenagoa in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Biomedical Science & Research*, *4*(3), 183-196.

Onuegbu, O. (2023). Anambra: NDLEA arrests 136 drug abuse suspects, seized 883.34kg drugs. Retrieved from https://www.blueprint.ng.

Otu, S. E. (2013). The" War on Drugs" in Nigeria: How effective and beneficial is it in dealing with the problem? *African Journal of Drug and Alcohol Studies*, *12*(2).

Ritchie, A., & Roser, M. (2018). Opioids, cocaine, cannabis, and illicit drugs. Our World in Data. Retrieved from https://ourworldindata.org/illicit-drug-use.

Ritchie, A. & Roser, M. (2019). *Drug Use.* OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from https://ourworldindata.org/drug-use

Saladino, V., Mosca, O., Petruccelli, F., Hoelzlhammer, L., Lauriola, M., Verrastro, V., & Cabras, C. (2021). The vicious cycle: problematic family relations, substance abuse, and crime in adolescence: a narrative review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 673954.

Ugonna, I. A., Okolo, V. O., Obikeze, C. O., Ohanagorom, M., Nwodo, S. I., & Oranusi, I. N. (2017). Effects of media advertising on consumers' purchase intent in Awka, Anambra State: A study of hero beer. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, *19*(4), 50-60.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2010). World Drug Report 2010, United Nations Publication, Sales No.E.10.XI.13. Vienna, Austria.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Nigeria. (2023). Response to Drugs and Related Organized Crime in Nigeria. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/response-todrugs-and-related-organized-crime-in-nigeria.html

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2021). UNODC World Drug Report 2021: Pandemic Effects Ramp up Drug Risks, as Youth Underestimate Cannabis Dangers. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2021/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2021_-pandemic-effects-ramp-up-drug-risks--as-youth-underestimate-cannabis-dangers.html

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2022). World Drug Report 2022. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_1.pdf

World Drug Report. (2021). UNODC World Drug Report 2021: Pandemic effects ramp up drug risks, as youth underestimate cannabis dangers. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/en/unodc-world-drug-report-2021_-pandemic-effects-ramp-up-drug-risks—as youth-underestimate-cannabis-dangers.html

World Health Organisation. (2019). *Management of substance abuse: Facts and Figures.* Retrieved from https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/facts/en