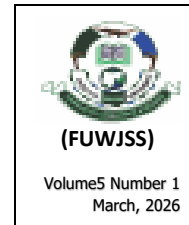


EFFECTS OF INTERFAITH PUBLIC RELATIONS BRANDING ON CITIZEN TRUST IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS IN NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study examines how interfaith public relations branding affects citizen trust in Nigeria's multi-religious environments. These are environments notable for recurrent conflicts that threaten social unity. This condition has brought about social interactions that promote religious strife and undermine confidence in cross-faith collaborations, resulting in splintered coalitions and rising insecurity in the country. The paper relied on Social Identity Theory and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory to frame the inquiry, illuminating both the dynamics of group attachment and the pathways through which trust-enhancing messages circulate within the Nigerian society. Data for the paper emerged through a systematic literature review of existing journal articles and academic book chapters. Thematic analysis was employed to extract and integrate relevant data. The study found that well-orchestrated interfaith public relations comprising dialogue platforms and coordinated media outreach successfully elevated citizen trust by cultivating a shared communal identity and countering extremist narratives. However, misinformation and deep-rooted cultural divergences emerged as persistent hindrances. The study concluded that interfaith branding, when strategically applied, constitutes a critical asset for solidifying multi-religious coalitions and for advancing the broader aims of peace and national unity. The paper called for governments to provide public relations training for faith-based organizations, tighter social media rules to reduce religious trolling, and joint community outreach initiatives that bring religious leaders together to create lasting trust.

Keywords: Interfaith, public relations, branding, citizens' trust, Christianity, Islam.

Introduction

Nigerian society has always been a source of cultural vitality and a theater of sporadic conflict due to its complex blend of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions. More than 200 million people live there, with Muslims predominating in the north and Christians in the south. Indigenous beliefs are scattered throughout the country (Kimani, 2024). Despite being a cultural asset, this demographic mosaic occasionally erupts into violence, with the long-standing legacy of colonial grievances, cynical political jockeying, and competition for land and livelihood feeding the fires (Abasili, Ezeneme, & Nwokike, 2023).

In light of this, interfaith public relations branding has been embraced as a purposeful, calculated effort to defuse tensions. Its goals are to reframe interfaith alliances as logical, reliable fronts. In order to change public frames of reference, practitioners use media campaigns, drama, town hall meetings, and even gospel-and-qasida festivals. They also weave narratives of shared values, such as peace, respect, and a reverence for human beings (Okpodu & Garba, 2023). However, the verdict is still pending, particularly in light of organizations like Boko Haram that transform public squares into terrifying theaters (Makai, Fadola, & Sholademi, 2024). Critics warn that even the most cordial alliances devolve into something that mimics but falls short of true solidarity in the absence of a systematic and reliable public relations apparatus.

Long-standing colonial tactics in Nigeria took advantage of religious distinctions to pit one group against another in the struggle for administrative supremacy. The initial rifts deepened after independence, as religious and ethnic allegiances were combined into a single, flammable identity during the 1966 coup and the civil war that followed (Udoekpo, 2024). In recent times, organizations such as the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) have surfaced, bringing together leaders from various backgrounds for discussion and action (Williams, 2023). However, a lot of people are still skeptical, blaming the councils' shortcomings on perceived bias or a lack of prompt crisis intervention (Favour, 2025).

In light of this, strategic branding becomes essential to reshaping these alliances into truly inclusive players. Clerics are humanized, and public trust is bolstered by targeted campaigns that highlight common humanitarian endeavors, like interfaith almsgiving drives (Ashafa, Akinnawo, & Paramole, 2024). However, there are many challenges along the way: sensationalist media quickly obscures pictures of collaboration by playing conflict footage nonstop. Beyond this, it's critical to use communication theory to create branding campaigns that highlight unity and reduce polarization. An approach based on theory, such as this one, may contribute

to healing rifts and promoting the long-term stability that Nigeria so desperately requires.

Bullets and years of conflict between the farmers and herders add to the long-standing nature of the problem in Nigeria. This problem is often increased by the diversity of religious creeds (Iordaah & Ukandu, 2024). Boko Haram's relentless attacks in the northeast have forced millions to flee, and have bred a widespread suspicion of government and religious groups. Amid the turmoil, interfaith conversations convened by local leaders appear as fragile, yet important, attempts to create spaces for the sharing of sufferings and mutual assistance. Roelofs (2020) suggests peace initiatives with local agency are more genuine and workable than those imposed externally, because they are more related to communities' daily orientations and experiences. The immersive contribution to the discovery of the common sets of the interfaith groups as those groups are seen to be as performative acts contributes a valuable lens to these historically and culturally rich chora of customs and modalities of space, more than the kinds of top-down narratives that often invisibilize them. It also needs to be seen in a constantly changing landscape of digital archeology, feminism, activism, etc., where many voices from people and institutions and organisations and just average users make local and even global impact on many diverse social platforms.

As the digital face of interfaith groups, Actor-narratives can easily become disfigured, such that today's observer may tomorrow become the supporter and/ or opponent (Iordaah & Ukandu, 2024). Moreover, in the ever evolving forum such as this, the algorithms they use on these websites tend to create more division than any mediation, thus volatile formations are precisely among the challenges in interfaith peacebuilding and misinformation still constitute. It is only with the certainty of communal resolve and action that interfaith programming will indeed get rooted - though that requires a certain amount of pragmatic religiosity - a student body all of whom has given up the goal of an exciting future, teachers that have retrained, schools that are existing and potable water etc. And if there's not transparency and accountability and due diligence, then best intentions just gets us a nice label not industry wide and change that is systemic (Roelofs, 2020).

The study, therefore, is also very interested if relationship-building can be collaboration both on negative community stories lodged into interfaith coalitions and/or networked into faithlines that provide sources of resilience in digital and physical space. In so doing role-modelling public relations in interfaith might be conceived of as a crucible with which to smelt common identities, not just an information role.

Creating shared identities in Nigeria demands the use of impactful symbols, including interspersed rituals, shared public spaces, or common festivals, since in Nigeria, religious identities often shape social life. The shared physical landscape appears to carry the burden of shared commitment at the site where Sobi Hill has been turned into a limestone amphitheatre, to invigorate interfaith dialogue, which Ogunbiyi, Fahm, and Akande (2023) take a moment to emphasize. The precariousness of such initiatives is revealed since this same area is contested by groups who perceive any shared emblem, place, or experience as compromising ideological integrity. The challenge is to engender these contests along the way of not eliminating the distinctiveness of each faith.

In this instance, public relations walks a fine line, always needing to change from merely claiming inclusion to living it. Iordaah and Ukandu (2024) argue that unintentionally, solidarity practices are transforming public meanings of interfaith coalitions by demonstrating difference in a manner that entails 'connectivity' rather than erasure. When the impressions of history begin to resonate with public's deeper civic history, these impressions become networks of collective identity that may sustain hardship. This will have to be done in the interdisciplinary space where sociology, communication, and theology understand the diverse lived histories and stories that resonated, and legitimate a sacred, public trust in the public sphere support for these networks. In this way, ecumenical public relations could be a quiet, stealth, and possibly powerful way to connect or act through reconciliation and repair of relationships especially under some of the country's most challenged fissures in Nigeria.

However, this raise some significant complications, including that establishing a coalition's trust is a complicated task and builds conjecture and endurance to prop up its tenuous promise. Public trust is the basis for legitimacy of multireligious coalitions and lost through indifference, or even animosity, should a coalition fail their promise more than once. Interfaith branding may intervene the cycle with storytelling that conveys tangible action, such as and the Kano Covenant as an example for the wavelength and in peacebuilding in a Nigerian context of violence with a goal to foster peace (Iweze, 2021), a persuasive social media strategy mediated with framed narratives.

With an amplifying media to establish and humanize the stories of successes of the spearheads of communities to inspire more public involvement. Emotionally displacing the important work of interfaith branding is the incendiary rates of the social religious abuses on social media, the various kinds of false news (Garba & Oshishepo, 2023). Through a public relations campaigning approach, public relations has to develop digital literacy campaigns, proven tools to lift allies and others to manage

misinformation and hostility. It is also important for the amateurs to continue with co-creators as using their networks and their emotional ecosystem are advancing toward creating durable coalitions.

This investigation is intended to showcase that Nigeria's textured and complex multi-religious fabric offers a lasting sense of belonging that is sustainable through a branding or specified practices. It is aiming to root and track social evidence systems to the collective same proposition. Its meaningful because of Nigeria's various capacity of advancing upon it diversity for developmental purposes as policies and regulations. Interfaith public relations has the potential for expanded coalitions-making Polarized by articulate and hopeful ambitions that advance an act of building trust to join persons of different communities. As denied by Iordaah & Ukandu (2024), and Ashafa et al., (2024) exchange, mutual giving builds an identity shared effort that gives realistic possibilities for congruency of messaging. However, these strategic pathways can be reduced to reactions; randomly thrown in across trajectories without timely coordinated and productive discovery from both transparency and collective learning. This inquiry will be one more step into this discovery, which also hopes to engage in theory-driven examples to make a case for the relevancy of this and its consequential significance to circles of public policy.

Nigeria's religious pluralism - which informs its identity - is repeatedly tested by violent outbursts that reveal the fractures of the society. Issues - most evident when we think of Boko Haram, but include ongoing challenges between Christian and Muslim communities, pastoralists and farmers, ethnic conflation, etc. - have stymied advances towards interfaith relations. Even though the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) was launched to foster relations and civility among religious groups, it often struggles to assert its legitimacy; critics, like Abasili et al. (2023), note that NIREC is either viewed as too partisan or not assertive enough, risking offending the constituencies it seeks to unify. This perspective isn't universally held, but it appears to lessen engagement and seemingly expand gaps in a way, that invites questions regarding how effectively, these pathways will operate in the complex religious context of Nigeria.

There are some barriers to moving the conversation regarding interfaith work towards a more inclusive approach that is collaborative, these barriers include an "infodemic" of misinformation, the existence of mistrust, and the competing victim narratives. Here, as Makai (2024) argues, violence is just one way of enforcing control and retaliation for perceived wrongs. Development concerns in local communities such as youth unemployment, land disputes and unhealed trauma keep an unending swirl of suspicions. One could say that, on a more basic level, these are the signs of the public issues that interfaith platforms seem to struggle with as well. In addition, as

Lawal (2024) cautioned, while the understanding amongst clergy is indeed increasing, that interfaith dialogue is important, this too may be temporary, if interfaith dialogues do not develop from intolerance characterizations, or opportunities to have explosive emotional outbursts. It could be argued that the aforementioned rival ways of being do not fully address this analysis, but they do show the challenges of fostering meaningful engagement in contexts where performative acts rapidly overshadow substance. At the same time, these are also ongoing conversations given that some of the initiatives have had positive returns despite the tension and contradictions they operate under.

Without a rebranding that positions the platforms as woven into the fabric of people's daily lives and local issues, public perspectives perceive the platforms as distant, patriarchal, and ultimately irrelevant. The modestly positive stories that interfaith efforts have reduced tension in some places are "outshout" by religious trolls, which is problematic (Garba & Oshishepo, 2023). Therefore, the need for focused research and action has literally become urgent as the lack of organized interfaith public relations increases cynicism and hinders the relationship between social peace and multifaceted nation-building.

The objective of this study is to identify the influence, issues and obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of interfaith branding in fostering trust and to develop actionable recommendations that will improve interfaith public relations in fostering trust within Nigeria's multi-religious contexts.

Interfaith Public Relations Branding, Citizen's Confidence and Religious Tolerance in Nigeria

Interfaith public relations branding is the deliberate implementation of communication strategies, such as dialogue platforms and media campaigns, to foster tolerance and harmony among a variety of religious communities. This is frequently consistent with broader efforts to enhance social cohesion. This concept is crucial for comprehending the manner in which targeted branding initiatives, such as coordinated media outreach and interfaith discussions, promote a shared communal identity and counter extremist narratives in a nation that is characterised by religious conflict. This is particularly relevant in the context of this investigation into Nigeria's multi-religious coalitions. For example, this branding employs public diplomacy to project a sense of harmony, akin to state-sponsored interfaith gatherings that foster mutual respect (Freer, 2021).

There are varying perspectives on interfaith public relations branding; some academicians regard it as a potent tool for fostering peace, while others view it as a frail strategy that could obscure more severe social issues. Advocates argue that structured dialogues with religious leaders can

effectively cultivate fraternity and harmony, thereby reducing conflict and enhancing trust (Freer, 2021). In contrast, it is also cautioned by critics that this type of branding might simply be performative statecraft, through which governments can link themselves to legitimacy concurrently, while continuing to ignore the deeper cultural differences or misinformation. This branding can also undermine public trust when public dissent has been muted. While interfaith branding is important for advancing national unity in Nigeria, it can only be successful if engagement continues consistently and with legitimate engagement. Otherwise, engagement that romanticizes gesture merely addresses deeper divides.

Citizen trust is the faith that individuals have in public institutions and leaders, and it is the basis of social cooperation and norm observance. This faith is founded on the expectations of competence, accountability, fairness, and honesty. In Nigeria's multi-religious coalitions, diminished trust, which is the result of religious disputes and perceived biases, erodes coalition efficacy and elevates insecurity, serving as the outcome variable that is influenced by interfaith branding in this investigation.

In particular, trust is crucial for maintaining interfaith cooperation in Nigeria's heterogeneous environment because its lack encourages disengagement and cynicism (Kaasa & Andrimihaja, 2024). In keeping with initiatives to strengthen social cohesion, the study also looks at how strategic public relations can rebuild trust by advancing inclusive narratives and dispelling false information.

Discussions about citizen trust emphasise its two aspects: process-based, which is connected to views of equity and transparency, especially in pluralistic societies, and outcome-based, which is connected to observable governance outcomes. Because they are seen as trustworthy individuals in the face of waning faith in political systems, religious leaders in Nigeria frequently enjoy greater levels of trust than state institutions (Kaasa & Andrimihaja, 2024). However, detractors point out that religious and ethnic differences, which are frequently made worse by elite manipulation, erode democratic participation by fostering mistrust and favouritism (Akinbode, 2022). Reformers counter that inclusive policies and open communication can help restore trust, but in Nigeria's multireligious context, obstacles like poverty and urban-rural divides make these efforts more difficult.

Multi-religious coalitions are cooperative partnerships between various religious communities with the goal of accomplishing common social or political goals, like fostering harmony and cohabitation in situations with varying ethnic and religious backgrounds. The idea is essential to comprehending how these coalitions, bolstered by interfaith branding, improve public trust by offering forums for communication and collaborative community projects that cut across polarising identities,

according to this Nigerian study. For example, by using Diffusion of Innovations Theory to explain how trust-building practices spread within communities, these coalitions combat extremism and promote national unity (Mbah, 2024). Furthermore, they are essential tools for negotiating cultural differences and lowering insecurity via cooperative outreach in Nigeria's pluralistic society.

While some academics emphasise the transformative potential of multi-religious coalitions for social cohesion, others draw attention to their susceptibility to underlying conflicts. Advocates contend that effective coalitions, like amicable Christian-Muslim exchanges, show resiliency through collective community endeavours, boosting confidence and reducing violence (Mbah, 2024). Nonetheless, critics note that identity-based conflicts that are ethno-religious in nature have the potential to weaken these coalitions by inciting animosity and political division, which in turn reduces confidence in national institutions (Chidi, 2022). Building on this, policies that shift towards secularism and educational initiatives are suggested as ways to strengthen coalitions in Nigeria in order to foster tolerance and maintain trust in diverse societies.

Ecumenical Public Relations Strategies for Citizens' Trust-Building in Multi-Religious Societies

The literature identifies that the ecumenical public relations strategies are critical to building citizen trust in Nigeria's multireligious coalitions, where Christian and Muslim communities work together on social issues. These strategies include media campaigns, discussion forums, and community-based activities in an effort to overcome religious divides through narratives of togetherness while exorcising the scepticism that resulted from previous conflicts. For example, the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC) hosts a collaborative programme that emphasises shared values through public relations, which reinforces perceptions of accountability and neutrality (Adabembe et al., 2024). Further, these activities develop a collective identity that addresses insecurity in Nigeria's culturally diverse context by reinterpreting religious identities, as peace-building resources aligned with communication theories like Social Identity Theory.

However, the efficacy of these branding strategies is not universally agreed upon by scholars. While some consider that it markedly improves trust through the leverage of religious leaders who discredit extremist narratives, it is then asserted that interfaith dialogues -with added support from seminars and media affiliation- are compelling opportunities for shared storytelling to socialise the community (Okpodu & Garba, 2023). Critically, if political elites subvert these efforts to mitigate their legitimacy without

confronting the underlying tension, then the distrustful narrative can only be exacerbated by branding that lacks genuine grassroots participation (e.g., state-led initiatives) (Jatau & Maza, 2023). Amplifying these findings further, data on branding via the North-Central region of Nigeria confirmed that collaborative, community-led branding initiatives had greater immediacy for reducing local grievances and were successful in orienting brand re-imaginings of identities toward co-operative identities (Adabembe et al., 2024).

This study extends the existing conversations on branding to counter the notion that ecumenical branding has become a performative moment by arguing that coalition trustworthiness can be enhanced through ongoing, strategic practices; it also identifies important gaps in the literature and nuanced considerations for screening these practices toward transformational outcomes through an inquiry of their impact on coalition longevity. In essence, this study suggests that sustained public relations practices are needed if trust in Nigeria's context of multi-religiousness is to be developed.

In Nigeria, this study reveals significant barriers to successful interfaith branding, as ethnicities and religious divides inhibit attempts to build trust in multireligious coalitions in the country. Misinformation that is distorted by sensational media, supporting stereotypes, is the source of persistent mistrust among coalition partners. In parts of Nigeria, framing interfaith collaboration as being inclusive in conflict-prone regions is frequently dampened by past grievances and selective religious interpretations that lessen inclusion (Lichtenheld et al., 2021). Additionally, the process of establishing trust is further impeded by the difficulties faced by faith-based organisations in maintaining outreach in the context of inequality. This limits the impact of the scaling of branding initiatives.

On the other hand, some academics are also focused on internal issues of religious organisations, such as structural patriarchy and doctrinal rigidity that interfere with collaborative branding efforts, which are necessary to create trust. These studies suggest that manipulative narratives of religion by political elites convert prospective spaces for trust-building into platforms of contention, which further split coalitions (Hashimu et al., 2024). Moreover, in Northern Nigeria, studies have indicated that security-related threats combined with a lack of collaboration amongst interfaith actors lead to the brand-building process suffering from coalition creation, which, in spite of best efforts, cannot hold public trust (Reardon et al., 2024).

This paper critiques the literature's attention to external barriers, creating focus for this study on the internal coalition dynamics of cultural differences and insufficient capacity-building, as key roadblocks to trust. In fact, to avoid branding initiatives exacerbating divisions, the present biases must be

'dis-internalised' through the synthesis of current literature. Thus, this study added to the conversation by calling for a universal approach to eliminate barriers, demonstrating the links between ineffective governance and the barriers, and presenting ways to enhance trust in Nigeria's pluralistic landscape.

Strategies for Enhancing Interfaith Public Relations to Promote Coalition Viability and Public Trust

Recent work presents even more options for improving interfaith public relations in Nigeria's multireligious coalitions, especially by emphasizing capacity building and inclusive policies, to improve public trust. Scholars advocate for government-sponsored mechanisms for open dialogues that create safe spaces for conversations, as a counter to misinformation and for connection. For example, recent research argued that educational religious leaders using public relations tools in their traditional outreach marketing can direct digital programs and manage crises by building shared memories (Maiwada et al. 2025). Collaborative community programs that include multiple faiths can increase trust and legitimacy by addressing socioeconomic conditions of division (Austin, 2023).

Yet, there seemed to be disagreement on the specifics of implementation priorities. While some scholars believed implementing stricter social media rules to limit hate speech would be their top priority, others preferred educational systems to teach children tolerance at a very young age. In contrast, proponents of transformative mediation. Expressed the need for steady funding for interfaith councils to extend the life of coalitions, and they must settle conflicts (Abdullahi & Schraml, 2023). From this understanding, research proposed that public relations using media to show positive branding cooperatively can build coalition unity and have public trust, lessening the risk of conflict by coordinating efforts for the credibility and intervention of civil society and faith-based organizations together (Zamani & Daniel, 2024).

This research posits a structure that combines public relations and economic empowerment to sustain coalitions that infuse the one dimensional element. It discusses the need for ethical training within faith-based organizations that address a gap in existing guidelines that converts public relations into a robust social change agent to develop trust, utilizing the most current research. This multidimensional lens of ecumenical branding enhances the chances that we remain united and trusted as we navigate Nigeria's multilayered religious terrain, and provides learnings for some policymakers.

Empirical studies produce additional opportunities for enhancing interfaith public relations in Nigeria's many religions coalitions, primarily

through the lens of capacity building and inclusive policies, to foster worshippers' public trust. Scholars advocate for government-sponsored mechanisms for open dialogues that create safe spaces for conversations, as a counter to misinformation and for connection. For example, recent research argued that educational religious leaders using public relations tools in their traditional outreach marketing can direct digital programs and manage crises by building shared memories (Maiwada et al. 2025). Collaborative community programs that include multiple faiths can increase trust and legitimacy by addressing socioeconomic conditions of division (Austin, 2023). Yet, there seemed to be disagreement on the specifics of implementation priorities. While some scholars believed implementing stricter social media rules to limit hate speech would be their top priority, others preferred educational systems to teach children tolerance at a very young age. In contrast, proponents of transformative mediation. Expressed the need for steady funding for interfaith councils to extend the life of coalitions, and they must settle conflicts (Abdullahi & Schraml, 2023). From this understanding, research proposed that public relations using media to show positive branding cooperatively can build coalition unity and have public trust, lessening the risk of conflict by coordinating efforts for the credibility and intervention of civil society and faith-based organizations together (Zamani & Daniel, 2024).

This study recommends a framework that integrates public relations and economic empowerment to build sustainability within coalitions that insert the one-dimensional element. It suggests ethical training within faith-based organizations to improve a shortcoming in existing directions that converts public relations into a strong social change agent to build trust, utilizing the most up-to-date research. Thus, this multi-dimensional lens of ecumenical branding strengthens the likelihood of remaining united and trusted when navigating Nigeria's multifaceted religious landscape, while allowing some learnings for selected policymakers.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

In the 1970s, Tajfel and Turner propounded the Social Identity Theory. It highlights that the social organizations to which a person belongs account for a part of their self-image and self-esteem. So, it leads to discrimination against an out-group as well as in-group favoritism. Social Identity Theory helps to explain the negativity of religious identities when related to religious coalitions in Nigeria because people tend to trust their surrounding religious groups more than some cross-faith group. Interfaith public relations branding resolves this by creating subordinate identities that do not allude to religious groupings to accomplish mutually agreed-upon goals, such as

peace. For example, religious trolling illustrates how online harassment that reinforces group boundaries undermines trust in interfaith initiatives. By emphasising shared human values, Garba and Oshishepo (2023) illustrate the capacity of branding to mitigate the effects of categorisation. This research concentrates on the branding framework that the authors promote. The objective is to investigate the cognitive social processes that underlie trust-building, which elucidates the psychological trust framework of this study.

Along these lines, Social Identity Theory posits that positive contact between groups, aided through brand events, can help reduce prejudice. In Nigeria, coalitions like NIREC use joint programs to reach this goal, but success depends on perceived status equality. Williams (2023) ties this to development to argue that reframing identities together builds trust. Problems occur when external threats, such as extremism, increase, strengthening in-group cohesion and branding. So, the theory suggests ways to increase the appeal of coalitions to ensure that branding fulfills identity needs.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of Innovations Theory was developed by Everett Rogers to trace the rampant social systems of ideas and the factors that influence them, namely observability and compatibility. In the case of interfaith public relations, it helps in understanding how branding the coalition's message of trust is distributed. Innovative approaches in Nigeria, such as social media, could increase the uptake of positive perception campaigns, but backlash ensues when they are at odds with the prevailing cultural frameworks. Garba et al. (2024) apply this theory in countering extremism and argue that public relations trust counter-narratives to increase positive relations. This is useful in understanding interfaith relations, initiatives, advocacy, and the expected uptake.

Champion brand adopters are innovators. They are at the forefront. They are the Initial innovators. They Defuse success, brand success. These leaders are specialized Diffusers Adeiwa (2023) underlines Developed. Social barriers to Axial. Axial focuses barriers on updateable approaches. Thus, it focuses on Tiered optimised controlled for active controlled diffusion.

Research Methodology

The library research was used to develop a discussion on the topic of study. This entailed the review of the literature that existed on the topic. The sources of secondary data are articles, chapters in books, books, online information, and similar materials in the form of reports and empirical studies. The rationale behind this approach was that it enables an overall synthesis of different perspectives without the limitation of primary data

collection, especially in delicate religious settings where some access could be restricted. In addition, it addresses ethical concerns, as it relies on publicly available and credible sources and reduces the risk of working in conflict-prone regions.

The thematic analysis methodology was applied, which includes the familiarisation with the data, creation of initial codes, theme searching, reviewing themes, defining themes, and then the report was made. To maintain rigour, deductive coding (based on objectives) and inductive coding (based on emergent patterns) were employed as coding strategies. The research was conducted in line with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to improve the structure and encompass identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages of sources.

Findings and Discussions

Influence of Interfaith Public Relations and Branding Strategies on Citizen Trust in Nigeria's Multi-Religious Coalitions

The results of this study indicate that interfaith public relations strategies, such as media campaigns and dialogue platforms, are effective in fostering public trust in Nigerian coalitions by establishing a shared identity that transcends religious distinctions. These strategies have significant compatibility with social identity theory because they frame religious groupings as complementary instead of competing. Moreover, they reduce in-group biases through constructive intergroup contact. For example, initiatives such as the ones NIREC has undertaken identify how joint action fosters better justice orientations of citizens through accountability and mediating the influence of leaders through humanisation (Adabemebe et al., 2024). Similarly, branding initiatives are crucial for sustaining coalitions within a historical conflict context because they foster empathy and collaboration and counter extremist narratives. Grassroots storytelling not only builds immediate trust and creates long-term social cohesion but also fills significant gaps in previous research that did not include the psychological elements of these processes.

However, the implications of these findings are much broader; they refute the idea that branding is only symbolic when it can be used to strengthen coalitions through consistent communication. Honest narratives that promote trust-building ideas are easier to accept, provided that the ideas are being transmitted through social media, traditional media, or conversations in the community, especially when the ideas are consistent with local cultural norms, following the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The literature theoretical position states that meetings and media

partnerships strengthen community development. For example, faith-based organisations formulating trust and community empowerment in North-Central Nigeria overlook the significance of collective culpabilities (Okpodu & Garba, 2023). The implication is valuable in displaying how the integration of theoretical frameworks like Social Identity Theory can maximize results, but these efforts are vulnerable to superficiality without purposeful customization. This insight influences policy in Nigeria's pluralistic context by indicating the need for branding that is adaptable to differing needs, thus turning fragile alliances into solid bases for national unity.

Barriers and Obstacles to the Effective Cultivation of Trust in These Coalitions through Interfaith Branding

The research shows evidence that mis/disinformation and cultural practices were two entwined components that were counterilluminating the effectiveness of interfaith branding in Nigeria's multireligious context, which engender mistrust, and fractious coalitions. The issues could fit into the framing entailed by Social Identity Theory, which suggests identity anchoring expedites a sharpening of divisions that do not help branding to develop interfaith understandings. For example, sensationalist media overrides inclusion messages or processes of inclusion that elicit pushback from prior historical realities, as may be noticed in conflict-imbued settings, where selective representations spawn exclusion (Lichtenheld et al., 2021). Furthermore, faith-based organizations also encounter economic inequities that produce cynicism, as well as face limited scalability associated with inertia and resource scarcity. The findings also indicated that the required form of cooperation to foster trust was also limited by internal institutional cultures, such as gender-based hierarchy.

Nonetheless, these barriers are aggravated by intersectionality with governance failures that interact in synergy, and which the review combined to present a more robust service model beyond outside probity. The critics alleged the elites deliberately manufactured narratives that intentionally pushed narratives into hostile spaces, which corresponds with Diffusion of Innovations Theory whereby compatible narratives and cultural frameworks stifle the adoption of positive messages (Hashimu et al., 2024).

Given the empirical study from Northern Nigeria (Reardon et al., 2024), insecurity further compounds initiatives from developing coalitions on security relationships that are unable to build trust, regardless of intentions. However, this study pushes back against the literature's focus on external processes by showing that internal processes, like a lack of capacity-building, also reproduce divisions, and these remain unregulated, worsening the divisions. These findings provide contributions to the conversation by

suggesting protective strategies to reduce the complications of governance in order to build trust in Nigeria's multicultural society.

Strategies for Enhancing Interfaith Public Relations and Strengthening Citizen Trust and the Long-Term Sustainability of Coalitions

The suggestions in this review, including areas for government-led training and more restrictive policies on social media regulation, have the potential to positively improve interfaith public relations in Nigeria by promoting moral conduct that upholds trust in collaboration (Zamani & Daniel, 2024). These recommendations support social identity theory by forming and inviting common identities through civic citizenship policies, and ensuring all branding is underpinned by more than symbolic gesture to enable real, measureable outcomes, including community engagement (Maiwada et al., 2025). An example of this is the recruitment of religious leaders for support for the digital publicity to strengthen the resilient narratives, thereby building solidarity against misinformation. The media is engaged to deliver positive branding as well as situate economic conditions and identity, through links to civil society, grassroots initiatives. Also, the findings from this research support the finding that long-term funding of councils can support sustainability and change the public relations landscape towards promoting a true united message.

However, the utility of these suggestions comes from their comprehensive approach, which includes economic empowerment and communication to fill voids in the existing body of research, which, in turn, challenges pandemics of loneliness. They hope the implementation of ethical training in institutions will speed up the learning of trust-building practices that are often culturally located in Nigeria, based on the diffusion of innovations theory. Although there are varying opinions about the priorities among mediation advocates, the common emphasis is on funding to facilitate resolution and build trust (Abdullhi & Schraml, 2023). In contrast, studies suggest civil society partnering creates an increase in cohesiveness, and educational changes instill tolerance in young people (Zamani & Daniel, 2024). As Nigeria's intricate religious terrain demands unity and trust across divides, this study adds to the body of knowledge by promoting multi-faceted approaches that potentially provide policymakers and legislators with insights.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals that interfaith public relations branding significantly enhances citizen trust in Nigeria's multi-religious coalitions by fostering shared identities and countering extremist narratives, though challenges like misinformation and cultural divergences persist. Strategic branding, when

culturally sensitive and sustained, transforms fragile coalitions into resilient platforms for peace and unity, highlighting its critical role in navigating Nigeria's complex religious landscape and advancing national cohesion.

Drawing from the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to bolster interfaith efforts: Social media platforms and regulatory bodies like the National Broadcasting Commission ought to enforce stricter guidelines against religious trolling, partnering with faith organisations to create safe online spaces that support positive interfaith narratives. Community leaders and civil society groups must initiate localised outreach initiatives, such as joint almsgiving and dialogue centres, to practically demonstrate coalition benefits and sustain citizen engagement. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with NIREC, should implement nationwide training programmes for religious leaders in public relations and digital communication to effectively brand coalitions and build trust.

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