

Nigeria Spokespersons Charter and Practice Code

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	
1. Introduction	
2. Objectives	
3. Purpose	
4. Applicability	
5. Spokespersons and Their Duties	
6. Roles and Responsibilities of Spokespersons	
7. Principles of Professionalism	
8. Media & Public Engagement	
9. Balancing Honesty with Informed Discretion	
10. Managing Communication Contexts and Scenarios	
11. Tips for Managing Public Personalities	
12. Techniques to Defuse Media Tension	
13. Crisis Communication	
14. Apology Frameworks	
15. Debunking Misinformation	
16. Managing Online Crises	
17. Handling Digital & Social Media Issues	
18. Legal and Regulatory Compliance	
19. Continuous Improvement & Professional Development.....	
20. Managing 'Difficult' Principals	
21. Accountability & Enforcement	
22. Special Provisions	
23. Review & Amendments	

Foreword

Sometime in 2023, we observed increased concerns about unethical conduct and poor performance of some spokespersons in Nigeria. Further observation revealed that the concerns were across board – public, private, and the civil society space.

Some factors were identified to be responsible - lack of basic training, inadequate exposure, challenge of understanding the peculiarities of what the particular duty entails, improper recruitment of spokespersons by some Principals/Organizations, quackery arising from lack of certification by some spokespersons, unavailable instrument for measuring standards and performance of spokespersons, no documented models of best practice, operating in silos in the absence of a credible platform for peer review.

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), with the support of the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, initiated the National Spokespersons Summit, now rechristened, **Nigeria Spokespersons Summit**, to reflect the originally vision of a comprehensive coverage of the Summit for spokespersons across the federation and all sectors of Nigeria's political economy.

One of the resolutions at the maiden edition of the Summit in 2024, was to have a practice 'charter' and 'code' to guide, strengthen and enhance performances of spokespersons under a more professional framework.

This **Spokespersons Charter and Practice Code** (SCPC), is the first attempt at actualizing this need. A lot of work has gone into producing the instrument, with endorsements from NIPR partners and sister organisations.

This is a very helpful handbook to aid professional and effective operations for spokespersons who are serious and hungry for success. It will make a very useful companion.

Dr. Ike Neliaku, fnipr
President, Chairman of Council
Nigerian Institute of Public Relations

1. **Introduction**

This *Charter and Practice Code* is designed by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), and endorsed by its partners in the public communication ecosystem, to guide professional and ethical conduct in the actions and activities of spokespersons who represent organisations, public figures, brands or institutions in Nigeria. As the regulatory body for Public Relations (PR) practice in Nigeria, **The Institute** has the

duty of ensuring that professional best practices, integrity, and ethical standards are upheld at all times in PR practice in Nigeria.

This guiding instrument is therefore to be strictly adhered to by all spokespersons and public communication professionals in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

2. Objectives

This instrument is to:

- i. Provide an enabling instrument for spokespersons to properly understand, and be well guided by, the public relations core essence of **building reputation, managing perceptions, cultivating goodwill, promoting trust, fostering understanding, encouraging friendship**, with mutual respect, and **strengthening relationship**, within and outside their operating environment; and
- ii. Help Principals/Leaders to understand the professional functionality of their spokespersons, and measure their performances, in line with the established standards and content of this charter.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this charter and practice code is to ensure that spokespersons are:

- i. Aligned to the professional values, and ethical approaches at all times;
- ii. Guided by confidentiality, and the need to protect sensitive information related to their principals and stakeholders;
- iii. Able to maintain accuracy and transparency in their communication, by always providing factual, clear and verifiable information to the media and the public;
- iv. Able to follow NIPR's crisis response strategy in sensitive situations, especially in cases of crisis communication;
- v. Able to maintain the right ethical standards at all times, by always showcasing integrity;
- vi. Inclined to exercise discretion in handling internal matters and stakeholder communication;
- vii. Objective, respectful and forthright when engaging with the media and the public;
- viii. Conscious of avoiding defamatory, inflammatory, or politically biased statements at all times;
- ix. Operating with clearly established ethical guidelines for spokespersons, image makers, and PR professionals;
- x. Mindful of preventing misinformation, unethical branding, and reputational risks;
- xi. Aware and alive to the relevance of feedbacks in public communication; and
- xii. Aligned to all communication practices with the standards set by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Act.

4. Applicability

In accordance with provisions of PART VI, Section 16, a, b, c, of NIPR Practitioners Act, Cap N114, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, LFN, 2004, the provisions of this document shall apply to:

- i. PR professionals, official spokespersons of public figures, brands and organisations, media representatives, and communication strategists;
- ii. Public relations officers and corporate communication professionals;
- iii. Members of NIPR engaging in public communication on behalf of the Institute; and
- iv. Individuals, designated by whatever title, who speak on behalf of any entity as authorized spokespersons.

5. Spokespersons and Their Duties:

Spokespersons are individuals who represent, or are recognized, as the voice, face and image-maker of an organisation, brand or public figure. They are entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining positive visibility, shaping public perception, building reputation, driving advocacy, managing crises, and fostering trust in the overall image of their Principal (individual or institution).

Their duties and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i. **Communication Concept Development:** Providing a holistic framework for message content and focus;
- ii. **Message Crafting:** Breaking down organizational goals and values into digestible narratives for public consumption;
- iii. **Reputation Stewardship:** Proactively projecting and moderating the reputation of the Principal, clarifying controversies, and amplifying positive narratives;
- iv. **Stakeholder Liaison:** Bridging gaps between the Principal and the public, and strengthening intra-organisational communication.
- v. **Agenda Setting:** Help the Principal to set them appropriate agenda based on realities that will attract acceptance and promote value for the Principal; along the line of reputation, profesional and financial values.

6. Mediatory Roles of Spokespersons

Spokespersons, at all times shall:

- i. Serve as the official voice of their organisations or principal;
- ii. Ensure the accuracy and credibility of their messages;
- iii. Be knowledgeable about their principals' values and ways, as well as their organizations' policies, operations, and positions on critical issues;
- iv. Be responsible for strategic messaging, brand reputation management, and media relations, and ensuring consistency in communication;
- v. Act as a bridge between their organisation and the public;
- vi. Always uphold the highest ethical standards in their interactions with the media and the public;

- vii. Ensure the accuracy and verifiability of the information they provide;
- viii. Maintain openness and transparency in their communication, while ensuring that confidentiality obligations are respected;
- ix. Be prepared to justify their words and actions, particularly in situations where public trust is at stake;
- x. Show respect for diversity by avoiding language, or messaging, that discriminates against individuals or groups because of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, or disability;
- xi. Avoid accepting roles, or engagements, that could compromise their impartiality or create doubts about their loyalty or objectivity;
- xii. Report unethical practices within their organisation to the appropriate authorities;
- xiii. Reject gifts, bribes, favours, or any other inducements that could compromise, or be seen to compromise, their professional integrity; or create a perception of bias.

7. Principles of Professionalism

Spokespersons should adhere to the following key principles, in order to maintain professionalism and excellence, and retain the right ethical standards in everyday practice.

- i. **Accuracy and Factuality:** Ensure that the information communicated is accurate and reliable;
- ii. **Transparency and Accountability:** Be open and take responsibility for the information output;
- iii. **Confidentiality and Discretion:** Maintain professional discretion when handling sensitive, or confidential, information;
- iv. **Respect and Empathy:** Treat all with respect and empathize with diverse perspectives, while remaining focused on core communication objectives.

8. Media and Public Engagements

When engaging with the media and the public, spokespersons should ensure that their communication aligns with organisational policies and accurately represents the official position on issues. In addition, they are to:

- i. Anticipate potential questions, particularly on sensitive issues, and be equipped with appropriate responses;
- ii. Always make it clear that they are representing the organisation and not expressing personal opinions;
- iii. Always ensure that their statements reflect the official stance and strategic priorities of the entity they speak for;
- iv. Communicate in a clear and articulate manner, avoiding technical jargon that could confuse the audience, during interviews and press conferences;
- v. Attribute all referenced data and statements to respected and reliable sources, to maintain transparency and credibility;

- vi. Maintain composure under pressure, especially when faced with difficult or hostile questioning; ensuring that responses are measured and appropriate;
- vii. Follow structured crisis communication protocols and make accuracy take precedence over speed, during crisis communication;
- viii. Proactively address public safety concerns, provide timely updates, and correct false claims swiftly and transparently to prevent reputation damage;
- ix. Assume that all statements are public, and on record, unless explicitly agreed otherwise with media personnel; and
- x. Guard and guide against anything that could expose their organisations or principals to ridicule.

9. Balancing Honesty with Informed Discretion

- i. **"Need-to-Know" Principle:** Disclose essential information without oversharing;
- ii. **When to Draw Red Lines:** Identify topics that cannot be discussed (e.g., ongoing litigation, trade secrets, matters being handled by a higher authority);
- iii. **When to Restrain the Boss:** Guide a new Principal, by providing information and contexts on sensitive issues he should avoid; or issues to address in the short, medium and long term;
- iv. **Consistency and Brand Alignment:** Be conversant with the organisational values and goals, or the Principal's position, on key issues.

10. Managing Communication Contexts and Scenarios

Spokespersons are advised to note, and be guided by, the following rules in their media Engagements:

- i. Always engage with the media on terms that favour you, avoiding ambush at all times;
- ii. Present your Principal for an interview only when it is absolutely necessary to do so;
- iii. Do not encourage your Principal to go into any public engagement or interview (formally or informally), weak or ill prepared;
- iv. Educate your Principal and yourself on the inappropriateness of using the phrase "No Comment," and on when to say instead "We are in constant communication with all parties concerned". Or, "As you are aware, my Principal/our organisation is committed to...";
- v. Always correct and deconstruct false narratives when you are responding to fake news;
- vi. Stick with civil language, and stick with the important points, when responding to negative portrayals of your Principal/organisation:

- a. Admit a writer, or speaker's, right to hold an opinion; then carefully identify and correct factual or contextual misrepresentations;
- b. Avoid abusive, inflammatory, dishonest, or hostile use of words.
- c. Watch for opportunities in the news cycle and determine when a message from your Principal could score the right emotional point;
- d. Understand and utilize seasonal greetings, commemorative international events, or birthdays of respected personalities for goodwill messaging.

11. Managing Public Personalities

Public Relations practitioners should pay attention to the following tips for effective management of public personalities:

- i. **Their Authenticity:** Project how they are true to something in which they are rooted and grounded (culture, youth development, social upliftment, commercial success, community service, etc.);
- ii. **Their Social Impact:** Link their personal success to community upliftment, or some other measurable outcome;
- iii. **Their Consistency:** Show that they maintain a clear, recognisable and dependable persona across platforms and in all situations;
- iv. **Their Adaptability:** Showcase their dynamism and ability to expand into new areas, industries, or interests; and
- v. **Their Engagement:** Use social media to humanise the brand and connect directly with fans.
- vi. **Create or Strengthen Digital Footprint: Given** the relevance and social impact of digital communication, ensure that your principal/organisation has a credible and robust digital footprint.

12. Defusing Media Tension: the AIDA Model

The A.I.D.A. Model:

- i. Acknowledge the question.
- ii. Isolate the issue.
- iii. Deflect gracefully.
- iv. Advance your message.

13. Crisis Communication:

Spokespersons must never forget that crisis, especially media-related crisis, does not give prior notice. For that reason, it is best to periodically carry out crisis Simulation Drills, thus:

- i. Conduct quarterly simulations (e.g., data breach, executive scandal) with staff and management;
- ii. Assign roles, using the Incident Command System (ICS), to spread awareness, pointing out the following:
 - a. Spokesperson: Manages media;
 - b. Legal Advisor: Reviews statements;
 - c. Operations Lead: Provides factual updates;
 - d. Monitor media coverage and correct misinformation swiftly.

14. Apology Frameworks for Crisis Communication:

Spokespersons should always remember and apply the following 4 Rs of Apology in crisis communication:

- i. Regret: "We deeply regret the harm caused."
- ii. Responsibility: "We take full accountability."
- iii. Remedy: "We are compensating affected customers."
- iv. Reform: "We've implemented, or we are implementing new safeguards."

15. Debunking Misinformation:

The Fact-First Approach is often the best engagement template for practitioners and should be deployed thus:

- i. State the truth;
- ii. Correct the myth;
- iii. Redirect to solutions.

16. Managing Online Crises:

PR practitioners should apply the SAVE Method for Trolls as follows:

- i. Stop: Pause before reacting;
- ii. Acknowledge: "We hear your concern";
- iii. Validate: "Your frustration is understandable in the circumstance".
- iv. Escalate, or de-escalate: Move heated debates to DMs.

17. Handling Digital & Social Media Issues

Spokespersons shall exercise caution when using online platforms. In addition, they should:

- i. Clearly distinguish between personal opinions and official organisational statements, ensuring that there is no ambiguity;
- ii. Fact-check content before posting, to ensure accuracy and avoid inflammatory or divisive language;
- iii. Refrain from engaging in online arguments, spreading unverified claims, or responding emotionally to criticism;
- iv. Ensure that online presence reflects professionalism and adherence to the ethical principles outlined in this Code.

- v. Never share internal discussions, confidential information, or sensitive data on digital platforms, as unauthorized disclosure could have serious legal and reputational consequences.

18. Legal and Regulatory Compliance:

Spokespersons shall ensure full compliance with all relevant laws, including those relating to defamation, intellectual property, and data protection. In addition, they are to:

- i. Avoid making statements that could be construed as damaging to individuals, organizations, or institutions;
- ii. Respect copyright and intellectual property rights, and always obtain proper permissions before using third-party content;
- iii. Be aware of data protection regulations and ensure that personal information is handled in compliance with applicable laws;
- iv. Adhere strictly to anti-corruption guidelines, to avoid any statements or actions that could suggest bribery, favouritism, or desire for personal gain;
- v. Be guided by ethical and legal compliance rules in all communication;
- vi. Register with the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations and adhere to the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Act and Code of Conduct.

19. Continuous Improvement & Professional Development:

Spokespersons shall commit to continuous learning and professional development, to stay informed about industry trends and best practices. In addition, they are to:

- i. Actively participate in conferences, summits, training programmes, workshops, and knowledge-sharing sessions to enhance their skills and expertise;
- ii. Mentor junior professionals, to foster knowledge transfer and ethical communication practices, if they have the experience to do so;
- iii. Look out for, and take advantage of, regular capacity-building initiatives to strengthen their knowledge base in emerging communication challenges.

20. Managing 'Difficult' Principals:

This has become a regular topic of discussion amongst spokespersons. In the real sense of it, there are no easy nor difficult principals, what we have may be different personalities manifesting different attitudes and operating in different ways and styles, sometimes based on circumstance. Where there is a case of managing a 'difficult' Principal/organisation, the following principles should be upheld:

- i. Always bear in mind that no two persons are the same. Even in close resemblance, there are still peculiarities and uniqueness;
- ii. Try to understand your principal very well, note the personality type, and peculiarities;
- iii. Design and develop your working relationship and operational strategy, based on the unique operating environment and circumstance of the principal/organisation;
- iv. Go the extra mile to prove that you care and you love your principal to succeed;

- v. Employing diplomatic strategies in managing such principals, especially when pressured to undertake act that run fouts of rules for political gains and other considerations; and
- vi. Be sensitive to know when being nudged to take the exit door, honourably, and without rancour.

21. Accountability & Enforcement:

Violations of the provisions of this Charter and Practice Code will have consequences, which may include retraining the practitioner, suspension, legal action, or removal from spokesperson duties; depending on the severity of the breach. In this regard, it should be noted that:

- a. Organisations shall establish clear channels for reporting breaches and define investigation procedures for handling violations;
- b. Sanctions shall be determined, based on the level of misconduct; ranging from warnings to termination where necessary;
- c. Organizations shall also implement internal review mechanisms, to ensure ongoing compliance with this Charter and Code.

22. Special Provisions:

Spokespersons shall promote environmental responsibility in their messaging, ensuring that their communication encourages sustainable practices. In addition, they should note the following:

- a. Acknowledge and respect historical and cultural heritage in their statements, avoiding narratives that undermine or misrepresent cultural identities;
- b. Strictly maintain and comply with anti-corruption, defamation, and privacy laws at all times.

23. Review & Amendments:

This Charter and Practice Code shall be reviewed periodically, to ensure it remains relevant and effective in addressing emerging communication challenges.

Issued this Tuesday, 15th April, 2025, by the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations.

Endorsed by:

- Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation
- Nigerian Guild of Editors???
- Nigerian Union of Journalists
- Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria
- Guild of Corporate Online Publishers
- Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria
- National Institute of Marketing of Nigeria

- Association of Corporate Affairs Managers of Banks
- Society of Nigerian Broadcasters