

BEYOND HOSPITALITY: MAINSTREAMING TRADITIONAL KOLA-NUTS INTO COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study evaluated the potentials of kola-nut sharing in community relations management by fostering unity, stimulating integration and inspiring friendship within communities in South East, Nigeria. It adopted the descriptive survey research design, with a sample size of 333 respondents drawn from a total population of 2000 traditional rulers or Chiefs, (Ndi-Eze or Igwes) of recognized autonomous communities in the five states in the South East, Nigeria. Results from the study evidently show that offering of kola-nut at local community ceremonies/events goes beyond serving as mere objects of reception or hospitality to guests in the South East Igbo speaking area of Nigeria. Findings from the study clearly show that kola-nuts serve as strategic public relations tool for fostering unity, stimulating integration, and inspiring friendship among people of various communities in the South East region of Nigeria. Against that backdrop, it is the position of the paper that, in view of the potency of traditional kola-nuts in building blocks for harmonious community relations and mutual co-existence, it should be accorded higher recognition and application as strong traditional public relations tool. The paper concludes that being a traditionally-rooted communication artifact that holds a lot of benefits in building community relations, community crisis and conflict management, kola-nut has the potency of being a community development tool as healer and unifier of some sorts not only in the South East region but other parts of Nigeria, and indeed African nations that share similar cultural ties.

Keywords: Kola-nut; Public Relations; Community Relations; Fostering Unity; Social Integration; Inspiring Friendship; Community Development; South East Nigeria.

Introduction

Within the portfolio of strategic communication, community relations precisely focuses on all the conscious communication efforts and programmes an organization undertakes to maintain a sustained beneficial relationship and understanding between her and its host community (Harrison, 2023; Wilcox, 2015, Tong & Chan, 2022). A host community is a key stakeholder the organization should understand its peculiarities and explore options to continue interfacing

with its members in order to earn their respect and support for continuous harmonious relationship. The frontier of community relations also extends to a community (church, autonomous community, university, hospital, etc) adopting strategies that make her responsible and friendly with its people, neighbours, and corporate tenants. From the lens of public relations, community relations thrives on a tripod of planned communication, mutual beneficial relationships/and organization-public relationship, enhancement of the environment to the benefit of both the organization and the community. However, organizations that are conscious of this tripod offerings explore and adopt different strategies or means to keep their pact with the community; and having understood the peculiarities of each host community, there are traditionally-rooted strategies that organizations(church, autonomous community, university, hospital, etc) should begin to incorporate in their community relations communication mix to effectively deepen their interaction and relationship with various communities where they operate. This is important because some of the regularly used strategies may not necessarily serve emerging purposes in community relations, particularly where a host community is well rooted in culture and tradition of its people.

In the South East, Igbo-speaking area of Nigeria, *Kola-nut* is culturally a symbol of hospitality, reception, respect, integration, unity, love and friendship offered to guests by a host at social/traditional events, gatherings and during important visitations.(Obineche, 2017). The *kola-nut* features predominantly in such occasions as coronation ceremonies, new yam festivals, age grade inaugurations, weddings, funerals, infant naming ceremonies, town union meetings, traditional religious assemblies, and rituals (Obineche, 2017). *Kola-nut* presentation and consumption usually precede the commencement of various occasions in the South East that bring critical stakeholders including host communities and organizations together.

As a symbol of social intercourse in the area, *kola-nut* is often demanded for by visitors if its presentation was omitted either by the error of oversight or for obvious negligence by the host (Obineche 2017; Echema, 2015). Otherwise, it is often presented, blessed, broken and eaten before the beginning of any meaningful discussion or activity between a host and his guest (Ubesie, 1975). When available, garden egg, pepper fruit, alligator pepper, and kola oil (*ose-oji*) are served alongside the *kola-nut* to the guest by the host.

Kola-nut is a significant socio-cultural symbol of building friendship, love, unity, hospitality, and integration that facilitates the achievement of those core objectives which community relations often set out to achieve (Burke, 1999). This suggests therefore that beyond the cultural symbol of *kola-nut* as form of reception or hospitality, it possesses other integral qualities which make it a tool of community relations management for the sustenance of community unity and harmony in South East, Nigeria. Thus, a community can therefore harness both the symbolic benefits and the other qualities of the *kola-nut* presentation to boost her interaction or relationship with its people.

Available previous studies on *kola-nut* in South East Nigeria have dwelt extensively on its symbolism and cosmology, the tradition, presentation and consumption, its blessing, sharing methods, and eating among the Igbos, who constitute the South East region of Nigeria (Obineche, 2017; Chidiome, Osisioma and Echem 2015; Unya, 2021). Kammampool and Laar (2019) focused on the socio-cultural values and identity of *kola-nut* including the historical significance, its influence as well as the spiritual meaning. None of these studies or

any other, explored any of the qualities and benefits of *kola-nut* mentioned above in facilitating the objectives of community relations in creating and sustaining friendship, love and unity among community people, hence the need for this study which attempts to fill the research gap in literature of community relations management in the South East area of Nigeria..

Against the above background, this study is aimed at assessing *Kola-nut* as a community relations (CR) management tool in the South-East, Igbo-speaking area of Nigeria, while the specific objectives include, to:

1. assess *kola-nut* offering as a community relations management tool for fostering unity in the South East Nigeria
2. assess *kola-nut* offering as a community relations management tool for stimulating integration among the South East people of Nigeria.
3. assess *kola-nut* offering as a community relations management tool for inspiring friendship among the people of South East, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

To state the hypotheses of this study, it is imperative to look beyond the metaphorical or representative values of *kola-nut* established by ancient traditional belief system of the Igbo people of Nigeria. These belief system and cultural values are passed on to posterity from generation to generation. However, the epistemology of metaphorical values of *kola-nut* espoused by the progenitors of Igbo customs and traditions, need further empirical evaluation within the rubrics of public or community relations mutuality principles of truth, trust, transparency, friendship and love. These principles are juxtaposed with the traditional values of *kola-nut* since they are similar when viewed from the angle of truth as a default principle. Unity, love and transparency are products of understanding which serve as essential elements of public relations practice for maintaining mutual relationship between two parties or entities. Hence, what builds trust and drives organization-publics' relationship is the consistency in upholding the truth. Traditionally and professionally, public relations practitioners are in the business of making friends and sustaining such relationship for the mutual benefit of both individuals and organizations. More importantly, building relationships demand practical demonstration of attitudes and behaviours that are endearing. Based on the above notions, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

H1: *Kola-nut* offering is not a strong community relations management tool for fostering unity in the South East Nigeria

H2: Offering *kola-nut* is not a strong community relations management tool for stimulating integration among South East people of Nigeria.

H3: *Kola-nut* offering is not an effective community relations management tool for inspiring friendship among people of South East, Nigeria

Review of Literature

Conceptual Framework: This paper revolves around the concept of community relations, utilizing *kola-nut* as a community relations management tool for fostering unity, stimulating

integration and inspiring friendship among the Igbo speaking people of South East, Nigeria. These constructs are discussed hereafter.

Community Relations Management

Community relations (CR) is anchored on a tripod of planned communication, mutually beneficial relationships/and organization-public relationship, and enhancement of the environment to the benefit of both the organization and the community. The concept of organization in this paper covers an autonomous community, church, university, construction companies, etc; it does not necessarily mean only corporate entity. Thus, CR entails different ways organizations or businesses establish a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with the community where it operates (PublicCityPR, 2022). Beyond adopting community relations at organizational level, its frontiers can be extended to the way a community uses it to foster unity, friendships and integration of people with/among its neighbours. Building relationships is critical to the life of every organization or autonomous community. Each has different publics or stakeholders to relate to or interact with in its day-to-day activities. As autonomous entities, capable of moral action", organizations must build and maintain long-term relationships with their communities" (LaFayette, 2000, cited by Achor, 2022), in turn, these relationships obviously influence the decisions made by members of the community.

Friendship, Unity, and Integration

Friendship is a state of enduring affection, esteem, intimacy, and trust between two people. In all cultures, friendships are important relationships throughout a person's life span. Friendship is defined as a bond of affection between two people. People are referred to as best friends if the friendship is really strong. From the above backgrounder, the word friendship has been conceptualized as a kind of virtue to promote living together (Lu, Leahy, and Chopik, 2023). However, there are few divergent views about it. There are the classical views of friendship as promoted by Aristotle and, the modern sociological views. Each of these views has deepened discussion that traditionally, as well as culturally, encapsulates the ideals of friendship. Aristotle's classical views of friendship are based on three forms: genuine friendship, one that is based on mutual usefulness, and the other, on pleasure. The duration of the last two forms are predicated on the presence of utility and pleasure while genuine friendship does not dissolve, and is not formed based on the sustainability of utility and pleasure. Genuine friendship takes place between good men, 'each alike wish good for the other *qua* good, and they are good in themselves'. The sociological view about friendship is hinged on the assumption that a "traditional society characterized by face-to-face and largely convivial relationships has been replaced by a more competitive and individualistic one". The friendship being built around *kola-nut* cannot change the minds of the young ones, unless if they are culturally rooted in traditions of their people. Perfect friendship based on goodness is what *kola-nut* presentation and use can symbolically add to community relations. It is assumed that only friendship of those who are good, and similar in their goodness, is perfect. Genuine and strong friendship promotes social integration and strengthens unity among the people. This form of friendship is built on trust, and this trust building can be sustained by the cultural values of a community.

Theoretical Foundation: Propinquity (effect) Theory

There are few theories that underpin friendship and relationship building within sociological and philosophical domains, public relations practice, and cross-cultural studies. One of the theories is the **relationship management theory**, propounded by Broom et al (2000). The relationship management theory posits that relationships between organizations and publics represent the exchange or transfer of information, energy or resources between an organization and its publics, which over time will help to build mutually beneficial relationships between them. (Broom et al., 2000). Another theory is the **propinquity effect theory**, which is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory was first propounded by Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950) and expanded or modified by other scholars to explain different taxonomies of relationship and friendship (Reis, 2007). Propinquity refers to the proximity or physical closeness of one person to another. The greater the degree of propinquity, the more likely that two people will be friends. Anchored on this notion, the propinquity effect theory holds that there is “the tendency for people to form friendships or romantic relationships with those whom they encounter often, forming a bond between subject and friend”. In cultural and environmental settings, persons who share close proximity within a neighborhood are regarded as neighbors, while those outside neighborhood circle are usually marked as strangers.

In the Igbo cosmology, building and cultivating relationship and friendship is activated by cultural values and beliefs, which are expressed in various ways that promote love, peace and social bond or unity. Conditions for forming friendship are culture-specific and have been examined in cross-cultural studies (Holmes, 2020; Lu, Oh, Leahy and Chopik, 2021). The essence of community relations is to promote understanding and cultivate relationship; within the propinquity effect theory. Communities foster relations with corporate neighbours and people who have cultural and other social ties with them. The *kola-nut* is used to oil these social and cultural ties among the community members and corporate neighbours. Culturally, *kola-nut* is a symbol of hospitality, respect, integration, unity, love and friendship. According to Penn State (2020), “local culture provides a sense of identity for rural communities and residents”(p.1). The use and celebration of *kola-nut* creates a sense of cultural identity. This identity, which also serves as an important tool in determining cultural values “facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values of a people. Culture contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity” (Penn State, 2020). The identity also influences the confidence custodians of tradition and members of a community have for coming together as a people or community, regardless of external interference.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design common in opinion and communication studies. This research method was adopted because it helped in understanding the phenomenon of *kola-nut* as CR tool in ensuring friendship, unity, and integration among the South-East people of Nigeria. The population of the study consists of Government recognized traditional rulers or chiefs (Igwes or *Ezes*) of autonomous communities in the five Southeastern states of Nigeria. These community heads are the custodians of the peoples’ culture and tradition (Ezeugo, 2022; Asikaogu, 2018). They also have vast experience in the veneration and use of Igbo *kola-nut* in both personal and cultural celebrations.

From available Fact-sheet, there are a total of 2000 recognized traditional rulers across government recognized autonomous communities in the five South-East states (Ministry of Chieftaincy, Customs and Traditions, 2021). Using the Taro Yamani formula, a total of 333 was derived as sample size for the study. Data collection was both a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale and a few open-ended questions. The multistage sampling technique was used in grouping the autonomous communities in clusters while respondents (traditional rulers, e.g. Igwes) were randomly selected among the selected local communities in each of the five South East states. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face to the respondents by the researcher before and after the quarterly meetings of the *Ndi-Eze-in-Council* in their respective state secretariat. Descriptive statistics (frequency tables, percentages, mean, and standard deviation) were used in data presentation and interpretation, while two-stage regression analysis was used in testing the hypotheses.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Results

Table 1 below indicates that a total of 333 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the traditional rulers (*Ndi-Eze* or Kings) in the five South-East states. Of the 80(24%) copies administered to respondents from Imo State, 71 or (88.8%) were completed and returned, while 8 were not returned; for Anambra, of the 67 (20%) copies distributed, 52 were completed and returned while 5 copies were not returned. Abia had 63 (19%) copies administered to respondents and of this figure, 50(79.4%) were completed and returned while 5 copies were not returned. Of the 63(19%) copies administered to respondents from Enugu, 54(85.7%) were returned, while 9 copies were not returned. Ebonyi respondents received 60(18%) copies and returned 35(58%) leaving a balance of a 25(41.7%) copies behind.

Table.1: Distribution of Questionnaire, Response Rate and Usage

States	No. Distributed	No. Returned	Percentage of Returns	No. Not Returned
Abia	63	50	79.4 %	13
Anambra	67	52	77%	15
Imo	80	71	88.8%	8
Enugu	63	54	88%	9
Ebonyi	60	35	58.2%	25
TOTAL	333	262(78.6 %)	71(21.3%)	70

Source: Field Survey

However, the distribution of respondents' demographics showed that all the traditional rulers were males. Educational qualifications distribution indicated that 24(9.1 %) respondents hold Ph.Ds, 68(26%) possess Master's degrees, while 130 (50%) hold first degree or its equivalent.

Furthermore, 25 (9.5%) possess Secondary School certificate, while the remaining 15(5.7%) possess National Diploma or its equivalent. Occupational distribution shows that over a little more than half (145 or 55.3%) are public servants’ retirees or business retirees, while 67(55.5%) were presently businessmen, while the remaining 50 (19%) were active farmers or traders. The age distribution indicates that 60(30%) respondents were between the age of 50-55years, 145(55.3%) were within the age bracket of 56-65, while 57 (21.7 %) were within the age bracket of 66-80. A little above the half of the respondents 141(53.8%) have spent 25 to 30 years on the throne, 98 (37.4%) have spent between 35 and 40 years, while 23 (8.8%) have spent 45 years and above. In terms of religion, 80 per cent of the respondents are Christians, while the remaining 20 per cent are traditional worshipers.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on kola nut as a community relations tool for fostering unity

Statements	Mean	StD
Presentation of Igbo <i>kola-nut</i> to community stakeholders by traditional rulers fosters unity amongst them.	3.44	1.159
Offering of <i>kola-nut</i> to community neighbours during festivals can cement unity between the community and her neighbours.	3.32	1.085
Kola-nut offered during and at the end of reconciliatory meeting serves as a tool/ symbol of unity among or between aggrieved parties.	3.53	1.152
<i>Kola-nut</i> often offered by the head of a household to his <i>Umunna</i> or clan man helps to bind them together in love and unity.	3.45	1.023

Source: Field Data

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of *kola-nut* as a community relations management tool for fostering unity in the South East. Results of the analysis show that a strong agreement with each of the strategic statements yielded higher mean scores and positive standard deviation. First, presentation of Igbo *kola-nut* to community stakeholders by traditional rulers fosters unity among them (M= 3.44, StD = 1.159). Similarly, offering of *kola-nut* to community neighbours during festivals can enhance unity of the community with her neighbours) as it yielded a M = 3.32, and StD. = 1.08506. Furthermore, by yielding M = 3.53, StD. = 1.152, it is indicative that *Kola-nut* offered during and at the end of re-conciliatory meetings for instance serves as a tool of unity among or between aggrieved parties. As evident from the table, with M = 3.45 and StD = 1.023, *Kola-nut* often offered by the head of a household to his *Umunna* or clan helps to bind them together in love and unity.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of Igbo Kola nut as a tool for stimulating Integration of people among South East people

Statements	Mean	StD.
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<i>Kola-nut</i> presentation when incorporated into community's conflict resolution mechanism brings conflicting parties together.	3.74	1.035
Presentation of <i>kola-nut</i> to community leaders to other community leaders during mutual visit stimulates the integration of both communities	3.68	1.069
Offering <i>kola-nut</i> by community stakeholders to corporate tenants establishes commonness and integrates cultures of both parties together.	3.63	1.203

Sources: Field Data

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on *kola-nut* as a tool for stimulating integration among South East people. Results of the analysis show a strong agreement with each of the strategic statements as they yielded higher mean scores and positive standard deviation. A higher mean score and a positive standard deviation (M = 3.74, StD. = 1.035) indicate that *kola-nut* presentation when incorporated into community's conflict resolution mechanism brings parties in dispute together. Also, result showed that presentation of *kola-nut* by community leaders to other community leaders during mutual visits stimulates the integration of both communities as the result yielded a positive mean and standard deviation (M = 3.68, StD. = 1.069). Result further showed that offering *kola-nut* by community stakeholders to corporate tenants establishes commonness and integrates the cultures of both parties together (M = 3.63, StD. = 1.203). In summary, with the average mean score, and standard deviations of the three statements standing high at (M = 3.68, StD. = 1.32), it is evident that *kola-nut* can be used as a community relations tool for stimulating integration of host communities and their corporate tenants.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on Kola nut offering as a CR tool for inspiring friendship among people of South East, Nigeria

Statements	Mean	StD.
<i>Kola-nut</i> offered to guests by a host inspires friendship between both parties.	3.49	1.26
<i>Kola-nut</i> presentation at events engenders harmonious relationship within the community.	3.40	1.40
When <i>kola-nut</i> is often offered to <i>Umunna</i> (kinsmen) and community neighbours, it inspires friendship in Igbo tradition.	3.50	2.65

Source: Field Data

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics on *kola-nut* offering as a CR tool for inspiring friendship among people of South East, Nigeria. Analysis of data show that each of the items has a high

mean score and a positive standard deviation. The first statement yielded (M = 3.49, StD. = 1.26) indicating that the *kola-nut* offered to guests by a host inspires friendship between him and his guests or audience. The second statement had (M= 3.4029, StD= 1.409) which shows that *kola-nut* presentation at events engenders harmonious relationship within the community. Similarly, with a mean score of (M = 3.5046) standard deviation (StD. = 2.657), it is indicative that *kola-nut* when often offered to *Umunna*(kinsmen) and community neighbours it inspires friendship among them. With an average mean score and average standard deviations of the three statements being high at (M = 3.46, StD. = 2.67), it is clear that *kola-nut* offering is strong CR tool for inspiring friendship among the people of South East, Nigeria.

Table 5: Explanatory variables in the study

Explanatory Variables	Mean	Standard Dev.
Unity amongst community stakeholders can be achieved by the sincerity demonstrated while presenting <i>kola-nut</i> .	3.730	1.451
Unity between a community and her neighbours is cemented through the belief that he who brings <i>kola-nut</i> brings life.	3.671	1.201
Unity between aggrieved parties is achieved when <i>kola-nut</i> is offered during reconciliatory meeting.	3.341	1.341
Love and unity can be sealed in a household by offering libation using <i>kola-nut</i>	3.321	1.320
Integration of cultures of host community and that of tenant is achieved via exchange of <i>kola-nut</i> and other cultural artifact	3..351	1.231
Integrating cultures of two different community leaders is promoted via sharing of <i>kola-nut</i> by both leaders.	3.471	1.101
Community's traditional conflict resolution mechanism is activated by breaking and sharing of <i>kola-nut</i> .	3.210	1.210
Friendship between guests by host is inspired by sincerity of heart used in offering <i>kola-nut</i> by the host.	3.981	1.250
Harmonious relationship within the community is a function of cultural and social factors.	3.641	1.541

Table 5 shows the explanatory variables used in predicting the other variables used in the two-stage least square regression analysis.

Test of Hypotheses

The three hypotheses were tested using two-stage least square regression analysis at 0.05 significant level.

Hypothesis One:

Kola-nut offering is not a strong community relations management tool for fostering unity among people of South East, Nigeria

Table 6 ANOVA for Hypothesis one

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7.311	3	2.437	2.803	.040
Equation 1 Residual	224.277	258	.869		
Total	231.588	261			

Table 7 Coefficients for hypothesis one.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	3.010	.346		8.711	.000
Equation 1 KolntFU1	.087	.047	.112	1.826	.069
KolntFU2	.059	.060	.060	.975	.330
KolntU3	.104	.051	.127	2.064	.040

Source: Computation of field data using SPSS

F-value= 2.803, t-statistics = 8.711, level of significance = .040

Key:

KolntFU1 = Presentation of Igbo *kola-nut* to community stakeholders by traditional rulers fosters unity among them.

KolntFU2 = Offering of *kola-nut* to community neighbours during festivals can cement unity between the community and her neighbours

KolntFU3 = *Kola-nut* offered during and at the end of reconciliatory meeting serves as a tool/ symbol of unity among or between aggrieved parties.

KolntFU4 = *Kola-nut* often offered by the head of a household to his *Umunna* or clan man helps to bind them together in love and unity.

F-value= 2.803, t-statistics = 8.711, level of significance = .040

Decision Rule

The ANOVA table shows that calculated F-Value of 2.803 resulted from offering *kola-nut* as a tool for fostering unity in community relations in the South East. This F-Value is less significant since it is less than the critical F-Value of 6.21 given 4/5 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Also, since the $P < .040$ and associated t-statistics = 8.711 is significant at 0.05, the null hypothesis is hereby accepted which states that *kola-nut* offering has no significant positive effect on fostering unity as a community relations management tool among the people of South East, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H2: Offering *kola-nut* as a community relations management tool has no significant effect on stimulating the integration among the South East people of Nigeria.

Table 8:ANOVA for hypothesis two

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11.156	2	5.578	8.28	.833
Equation 1 Residual	7896.567	259	30.489		
Total	7907.723	261			

Table 9: Coefficients for hypothesis two

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	22.276	43.708		.510	.611
Equation 1 1 KolanutIntgr	-5.604	12.424	-4.313	-.451	.652
KalonutIntg2	.676	1.264	.621	.535	.593
KalonutIntg3	.834	313	.446	.489	.797

Source: Computation of field data using SPSS

F-value= 8.23, t-statistics = .510, level of significance= . 611

Key:

KolanutIntgr1= *Kola-nut* presentation when incorporated into community’s conflict resolution mechanism brings conflicting parties together

KalonutIntg2 = Presentation of *kola-nut* by community leaders to other community leaders during mutual visit stimulates the integration of both communities.

KalonutIntg3 = Offering *kola-nut* by community stakeholders to corporate tenants establishes commonness and integrates cultures of both parties together

Decision Rule

The ANOVA table shows that calculated F-Value of 8.23 resulted from offering *kola-nut* as community relations tool on stimulating the integration of the South East people. This F-Value is significant since it is greater than the critical F-Value of 2.21 given 2/3 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Also $p < .611$ and associated t-statistics = .510 is significant at 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is hereby accepted which states that offering *kola-nut* as community relations tool has significant effect on stimulating the integration among the South East people of Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three:

H3: *Kola-nut* offering as a CR tool does not inspire friendship among people of South East, Nigeria.

Table 10: ANOVA for hypothesis three

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Equation 1 Regression	5.840	3	2.920	11.964	.142
Residual	385.156	259	1.487		

Total	390.996	261			
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Table 11: Coefficients for hypothesis three

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	2.923	.297		9.842	.000
Equation 1 Kolantafnship 1	-.059	.058	-.063	-1.009	.314
Kolantafnship 2	.084	.055	.096	1.537	.126
Kolantaship3					

F-value = 11.964, t-statistics = .9.842, level of significance= .142

Key:

Kolantafnship1 = *Kola-nut* offered to guests by a host inspires friendship between both parties

Kolantafnship2 = *Kola-nut* presentation preceding events engenders harmonious relationship within the community

Kolantaship3 = When *kola-nut* is often offered to Umunna (kinsmen) and community neighbours, it inspires friendship in Igbo tradition.

Decision Rule

The ANOVA table shows that calculated F-Value of 11.964 resulted from offering *kola-nut* as community relations tool for stimulating integration among the South East people of Nigeria. This F-Value is significant since it is greater than the critical F-Value of 6.21 given 3/5 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Also, $p < .142$ and associated t-statistics = 9.842 is significant at 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is hereby accepted which states that *kola-nut* offering as a CR tool inspires friendship among people of South East, Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

Results from the study show that two of the three hypotheses tested were positive, and one negative. That is, hypotheses 2 & 3 had the alternate accepted, and hypothesis 1 had the Null hypothesis accepted. Summary of the results are as follows:

- H1 test shows that *kola-nut* offering has no significant effect on fostering unity among the people of South East, Nigeria as a community relations management tool.
- H2 test indicates that offering of *kola-nut* has significant positive effect on stimulating integration among South East people of Nigeria as a community relations management tool.
- H3 test reveals that *kola-nut* offering inspires friendship among the people of South East, Nigeria as a community relations management tool.

To a reasonable extent, results from this study align with previous studies. Findings by Abah (2016) hold that *kola-nut* is used to invite and welcome the ancestors during conflict

resolution, hence “whosoever harbours grudges against a neighbour after the *kola-nut* had been eaten will come under the wrath of the ancestors”. The implication of this is that *kola-nut* builds and sustains peaceful co-existence among the community people which are resultant effects from stimulating integration and inspiring friendship which *kola-nut* offering engenders based on the two positive results from the hypotheses tests. Harmonious living in communities is the epicenter of their peaceful co-existence which *kola-nut* is found to be a strong tool for. Both the findings of Obineche (2017) and Unya (2021) corroborate current one that *kola-nut* symbolizes lasting friendship and integration in communities or areas that accord it deserved recognition and application. Results also indicated that *kola-nut* offered during and at the end of reconciliation meeting serves as a symbol of unity among or between aggrieved parties. The results of this study also buttress conclusions of Abah (2016) that peace can only reign where there is security and justice; this symbolically is embedded in *kola-nut* which serves as a unifying factor in community co-existence. By inspiring friendship and integration, *kola-nut* serves as a key ingredient for maintaining harmonious relationship and building love among community members or between an organization and the host community.

Although one of the results of this study indicates that *kola-nut* offering has no significant effect on fostering unity in community relations management in the South East Nigeria, that differed from the findings of Isidenu (2018) that unity is re-enacted each time *kola-nut* is celebrated or presented at different occasions. According to Isidenu (2018), *kola-nut* offering is mostly offered at Igbo gatherings involving kinsmen, villages and clans or traditional ceremonies/events. For example, after *kola-nut* is presented and blessed, it is shared in order of seniority to representatives of various clans, villages, towns or state. This also shows that *kola-nut* is “the first thing to be served to a visitor as it is believed that it symbolizes reception, peace, love and also shows that one is warmly welcomed peacefully”. In sum, *kola-nut* in Igbo land of South East, Nigeria essentially symbolizes peace, harmony, love, reconciliation, integrity, fraternity, hospitality, goodwill and kindness. These are the ingredients that unite people of different communities in Igbo land. Community relations thrive on these virtues. The findings here further align with the principle of neighbor relations, which are “informal and social relations that constitute a part of everyday life for virtually all members of contemporary urban societies” (Ruonavaara, 2021, p. 379).

A study by Lee and Kee (2017) places relationship management as a conceptual locus for public relations theory and practice; hence, the symbolism of life that is being promoted through *kola-nut* mythology is what communities and organizations are to practice as they oil their friendship and relationship with the community stakeholders. Maintaining communal community relationships is key to community and organizational relationships, which can be pursued by adapting people's cultural values. However, the argument here is that custodians of culture should leverage on the culture of their people in strengthening community ties, and sense of oneness, and incorporate culture (*kola-nut* presentation) into their community relations strategies for a sustained and enduring mutual relationship. *Kola-nut* presentation by the custodians of culture in Igbo speaking South East, Nigeria is a “precondition for building trust and connections between people of diverse backgrounds or identities, as well as for realizing

the diversity advantage (CDADI, 2021). The result of this study further aligns with Gamaliel's (2023) promotion of the attributes of dharma in the etic and emic cultural dimensions of India for the purpose of marketing India as a global investment destination. Every culture has a value that makes it unique. Organisations operating in a culturally-oriented environment must understand the importance of cultural values to be able to adapt their community relations practices and corporate social responsibility practices along that lines.

Conclusion and Implication for Development

The frontiers of community relations research have further been expanded by this study. The application of traditional *kola-nut* as a community relations management tool has opened a new vista to public relations literature. *Kola-nut*, as evident in the results of this study, is a veritable tool for advancing harmony, peace, love and unity among the community people of South East, Nigeria. Thus *kola-nut* serves a dual role of not only being a means of reception or hospitality to guests at community settings, it further provides a conducive atmosphere and environment for sustaining peace and harmony among community residents. By implication, it further serves as a development tool in these rural traditional community settings of the Igbo speaking South East region of Nigeria. Extant literature subsists that enduring peace and harmony are sine qua non to meaningful development anywhere. It therefore follows that if *kola-nut* offerings could stimulate peaceful and harmonious relationship among the people of South East, Nigeria, it equally serves as a precursor to development in the area. This logic could be said to align with extant literature on crisis management. Arguably, it is therefore the thesis of this paper that a conscious strategic application and management of *kola-nut* offerings in the communities, community development would fall in place.

There are many symbolic and metaphorical values of *kola-nut* which have been used to advance interpersonal relationships, community-relationship, and spiritual relationships. This study has shown the importance of adopting the traditional or cultural values of *kola-nut* by people in most communities in South East, Nigeria. Studies have shown that a community is usually at peace with its neighbors (corporate organizations or people) that respect its culture and traditions (Ottuh, 2021, Igbokwe, 2018).). Therefore, in promoting culture, communities can harness their values to enhance relationships with critical host community stakeholders.

The *kola-nut* has become a communication artifact used in mediating cultural bond among and between neighbours, hence "neighbour relations involve a special kind of reciprocity", argues Ruonavaara, (2021,p.381), which neighbours strive to achieve as they commonly present, break, and share the *kola-nut* to guests.

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