



SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND ITS CHALLENGES AMONG PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

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Abstract

This study investigated the motives for adoption of social media platforms among public relations practitioners in public institutions. The study adopted qualitative research method as well as in-depth interview as a data collection instrument through which the use of social media is explored from the practitioners' perspectives. With a population of one hundred and ninety five registered members, purposive sampling method was used to select ten members who are information officers of PR departments or units in public establishments within Kwara State of Nigeria. The findings of the study show that the practitioners use social media due to their importance, such as interactivity, mutual relationship as well as connectedness. Lack of control and irreversible nature of information posted on social media are also identified as few of the challenges encountered by the practitioners. It is, therefore, recommended that more studies should be embarked upon with a view to exploring the influence of other variables, such as self-efficacy, socio-economic influence, availability of enabling technological devices on the adoption of social media among the practitioners.

Keywords: Use, challenges, Public Relations, Social Media, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

The widespread impact of social media and other new media across the world of life has opened up critical dialectics in the field of public relations (herein refers to PR) globally. As social media and other internet technologies have become central to people's routines, the call to integrate social media strategies in PR practices and campaigns has, therefore, become a necessity. PR is a deliberate and strategic effort of establishing and maintaining effective two-way communication between an organisation and its various stakeholders. Social media platforms remain efficient ways through which an organisation's communication goals are achieved. In today's digital and information-driven society, social media platforms brought together fragmented audiences. Consequently, social media usage has continued to gather momentum across the global enterprise, providing their users with news, information, entertainment and knowledge about brands and products.

According to Visual Capitalist (2021), an organisation that provides data on social media usage and popularity, there are about 4.5 billion people across the globe, representing 57 per cent of the world population that use at least one form of social media. Similarly, out of the five most popular social media applications, four are owned and controlled by Meta, the tech giant formerly known as Facebook. As at October 2021, the top five social media platforms with active users include Facebook (2.89 billion), YouTube (2.29 billion), WhatsApp (2 billion), Instagram (1.39 billion), and Facebook Messenger (1.3 billion) (Statista, 2022). As a consequence, the popularity of social media among people of different socio-cultural backgrounds and economic status have made them useful for PR practices.

While mainstream media such as the radio, television and newspaper have been predominantly used as media strategies in corporate communication and PR campaigns, the emergence of social media and other internet technologies bring along with them opportunities and challenges to PR practice. To this end, PR departments in public and private organisations have witnessed and continued to witness rapid changes in the usage of social media platforms in promoting symmetrical dialogues between organisations and their publics. The platforms are being used to promote organisations' activities, thus revolutionising the way and manner PR departments manage issues, relationships and conduct environmental scanning and other PR campaigns tactics, which used to be exclusive reserves of the traditional or mainstream media.

Statement of Research Problem

Although, studies, both qualitative and quantitative (e.g., El-Kasim & Idi, 2017; Agha, 2017; Saadudeen, Olohunbebe, Ibraheem, & Okoji, 2021) have affirmed crucial role of social media in attaining PR campaigns and corporate communications, motivations and challenges of social media by PR departments among public organisations are yet to be attracting considerable academic attention. In line with this yawning vacuum in the literature, this study fills the gap by studying qualitatively why PR departments adopt social media and the possible challenges they face using the platforms in the industry. For example, while Saadudeen et al (2021) focused on the use of social media platforms among PR consultants in



Lagos State, this study, however, poises to investigate the application of the media among public establishments in Kwara State with a view to understanding perspectives of the practitioners.

With all the importance of PR in the corporate world, quite a number of literature (e.g., Ruggiero, 2009) have shown that uses and gratification have been applied in studying the use of mass communication and new media by the public, but few of the studies have instead chosen to apply other theories such as the Unified Theory of Use and Acceptance of Technology (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton, and Sweetser, 2010; Saadudeen et al., 2021). As a result, this study investigates the adoption of social media by the PR departments from the uses and gratification perspective.

While significant role played by social media in the corporate world, particularly PR, have been identified, according to some extant literature (e.g., Distaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011; Luo & Jiang, 2012), some issues such as the levels of control, ethical considerations as well as the measurement of their effectiveness still pose a challenge. This study, therefore, explores measures put in place by PR departments in tackling the aforesaid issues.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to:

1. Identify motives for social media use among public relations practitioners.
2. Understand challenges public relations practitioners encounter in using social media.

Literature Review

Public Relations and Social Media Use

PR practice, if properly employed, has influence on an organisation in several ways, ranging from image creation and promotion, goodwill creation, problem research and analysis to execution and evaluation of deliberately planned policies and campaigns. PR has several appellations because of the dynamics of its practices across the world. These include publicity department, press office, literary bureau, promotions department, communications department, public affairs office and marketing communications (Ajala, 2001). Similarly, there are some terms or disciplines such as publicity, advertising, sales promotions, marketing and propaganda which are often confused with PR, thus resulting in a lack of proper use and understanding of what PR is and how it should work towards achieving maximum impact.

One of the cardinal goals of a PR department in an organisation is to achieve two-way symmetric flow of communication through the adoption of highly interactive media. Hence the use of social media becomes imperative in order for the departments to reach their target publics with messages and information about their organisations in their day-to-day interactions. This explains the reason why Lee (2013) noted that social media capture the attention of PR practitioners because of their interactivity potentials. It is worth noting that the two-way symmetrical model seeks to establish mutual relationship between organisations and those publics that have been hampered by the use of traditional media (Gruning, 2009).



As a result, communications mostly end up in a two-way asymmetric. But, the adoption of social media among PR departments has helped organisations to overcome this barrier (Kumar, 2014).

Social networks are a collection of networked communities which allows social or professional relationship between individuals with similar interests. In that regards, PR executives are expected to create and maintain effective two-way interactions with stakeholders by utilising these platforms. While social media and social networks are sometimes used interchangeably, one of the features which distinguish them is that the former are used for communication while the later is used to 'build network of people' (Tehopedia, 2020). In essence, social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and the likes, are useful for successful execution of PR communication plans. They have become dominant factors in today's corporate and digital communications as they influence how brands operate and relate with customers and other stakeholders (Saadudeen et al., 2021). Similarly, there is quite a number of social media tools being used by PR corporate communications executives. These include Google News Alert, Sane box, Todoist, One Note, Muck Rack, Buzzsumo, Notes, Twitter, Bizversity, LinkedIn Business Navigator, Slack and Hoodsuite (Forbes, 2021).

Some of the changes necessitated by the use of social media in PR include, but not limited to, interacting with brands' customers and other stakeholders; owning one's media for the exclusive dissemination of PR information; reaching journalists (for example, through Twitter); and finding media opportunities as well as influencers (Mekky, 2019). Also, businesses and brands use social media and sites to maintain customers' loyalty and participation, and monitor their opinions (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Another notable change brought about by social media and networks is their potential to facilitate multi-directional dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders (Lee, Sha, Dozier, & Sargent, 2015).

Studies have suggested awareness and motivations for the adoption of social media by PR departments among cultural institutions such as museums (Suzic, Karlicek, & Stritesky, 2016), multinational companies (Khrishan, 2015), PR consultants (Kirat, 2019; Alikilic & Atabek 2012). For example, Suzic et al (2016) found out that there was low social media presence as well as lack of integration and simultaneous use of social media application for business purposes by two museums (Prague and Berlin museums) whose social media accounts were analysed in the study. Although there are some multinational companies that are yet to embrace the use of social media and networks, substantial number of prominent companies in Dehli, India have been adopting social media for their professional needs (khrishan, 2015). Social networking sites enjoy wide acceptance and popularity among the Turkish PR practitioners as they are aware of the importance of the media in achieving organisation's communication goals (Alikilic & Atabek 2012). Like their Turkish counterparts, a majority of the Qatari PR practitioners who participated in a survey on the adoption of social media agreed that the technologies have a 'considerable impact' on PR practices and departments (Kirat, 2019).



Some studies focus on motivations for social media adoption (Saadudeen et al., 2021; Mansour & Abu-Arqoub, 2020; Agha, 2017). For example, chief among the motivating factors for the adoption of social media among Nigerian PR consultants include providing instantaneous feedback, having constant engagement with stakeholders as well as managing brands' reputation online (Saadudeen et al., 2021). A comparative study on the use of social media among PR departments in some selected universities in the South-East of Nigeria also showed that the media are changing the traditional way of information dissemination (Agha, 2017). Using Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTUAT), factors that affect social media adoption among PR practitioners in the United Arab Emirates include 'anticipating the performance, availability of the facilities, intention of usage, expected effort and social impact [which] are positively correlated and significant with behavioral intention'. Besides, positive correlation was found to exist between performance expectancy and behavioural intentions to adopt social media (Mansour & Abu-Arqoub, 2020).

Patterns of social media use has also received considerable attention among PR researchers (Kirat, 2019; BinShaik, Adnan, Ali, & Mohomad, 2016; Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015). For instance, some of the new media and social networks being used among Qatari PR practitioners include corporate website, Email, Intranet, social networks, blogs, forums, podcast, wikis as well as social bookmarking (Kirat, 2019). BinShaikh et al (2016) found out that the use of Facebook to broadcast brands has lower responses compared to businesses that use other platforms to ask about customers' opinions. This result is consistent with Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antwi (2015)'s finding which suggested that the use of Facebook among companies is on the increase, but information flow remains largely one-way. By inference, organisations that rely on Facebook do not engage with their customers constantly.

Challenges of Social Media to Public Relations

Though social media came with a huge promise to PR profession just as they did for other professions, the speed of the changes and the quest to adopt social media tools and their dynamics to organised profession such as PR has pose a few number of challenges. For example, Distaso et al (2011) suggested that the most common challenges of social media adoption among PR practitioners include lack of control associated with the social networks, exposure to internal and external crises, anonymity of social media users. Furthermore, it is problematic for PR practitioners to effectively manage social media campaigns which revolve around issues of transparency, disclosure and responsibility as often encountered in some interview responses while the true identity of social media users is often difficult to ascertain as trolls use bots accounts to attack brands online (Luo & Jiang, 2012).

Being susceptible to online attacks may be triggered as a result of how a product message is positioned on social media. For example, when an individual's motivations for seeking a particular information is at variance with what they are being offered on an organisation's social media account, they tend express negative comments or review on such brand, most especially if the content is meant to push sales (Berkley, 2007). While brand social networking sites are used to aggressively increase sales of a product or service, PR practitioners are often confronted with the resultant effect of over-commercialisation of



networking sites, as some stakeholders may feel that their opinions are either not valued or are being subdued online (McLennan & Howell, 2010). For PR practitioners to effectively adopt social networking sites, they are expected to pay adequate attention to insights and criticisms as expressed by their stakeholders online.

Another source of concern following the adoption of social media among PR practitioners is about how to determine effectiveness or impact of social media in PR campaign or practices. Having basic knowledge about an organisation's publics pose a challenge to PR executives (Willis, 2015) as practitioners sometimes grapple with having understanding of social media efficacy because they are still relatively new in the field (Krishan, 2015). Despite having billions of people who momentarily live off wired communities, PR practitioners seem to know little about their social, psychological and emotional needs, thus making an individual loyalty to, say a brand, an unfamiliar concept. Though people are connected through social networks, the nature of social interactions between PR practitioners and their stakeholders may not often yield the expected results. As Kent and Taylor (2014, p. 30) put it:

Virtual social interactions, often among total strangers, is taking place in asynchronous in time-shifted segments...The fragmentations that we see as technology evolves may be as inevitable as the rising tide, but the important question is what will communication professionals who seek to build relationship do about it?

Theoretical Underpinning: Dialogic Public Relations Theory

As a way of achieving effective communication process, information technology such as the internet, social media and other new media are expected to change the nature and quality of the relationships between organisations and their publics. To that end, five principles have been suggested upon which these media can facilitate successful execution of PR practices. They include: having useful information; encouraging return visits; building an intuitive interface; keeping visitors on the website (social media inclusive); and promoting a dialogic loop (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

In an attempt to explicate dialogic theory, Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) offered operational conceptualisation of the five principles. For example, usefulness of information is determined based on potential users (media, investors and customers) and contents of the media such as links to news releases, media room, speeches, policies, video and audio materials, and industry news. Similarly, social networks sites such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and the likes are considered as capable of sustaining users' interest while surfing a company's website. This can be achieved by linking social media platforms to its website as well as providing updates on organisations or brands regularly. The principle of 'dialogic loop' requires that organisations facilitate discussions with stakeholders by asking users to comment or react to an issue which affects them or by responding directly to an enquiry or complaint made by users who are on their friends' or followers' lists on Facebook and Twitter respectively.



There are five principles of dialogic public relations theory. These include: (a) mutuality (the recognition of organisation-public relationships); (b) propinquity, (the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics); (c) empathy (the supportiveness and confirmation of public causes); (d) risk (the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms); and (e) commitment (the extent to which an organisation gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation and understanding in its interactions with publics) (Kent & Taylor, 2002). And considering the volatility of issues on social media, organisations are expected to develop and sustain constructive relationship with their stakeholders on social media (Willis, 2014). Theoretically, there are five related activities applicable to the theory: using the media of choice for effectiveness; exploring internal resources; managing user's expectations; identifying user's preferences; and refining for standardised measurement of dialogic (McAllister-Spooner, 2009).

The application of the dialogic public relations theory in this study underscores the fact that social media have the potential to facilitate effective two-way communication between an organisation and its publics. Hence, this study poises to further establish the extent to which the theory is applicable in the context of public relations practice in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study is essentially a qualitative research in which in-depth interview was adopted with a view to understand the motives for social media use and challenges among PR departments in public organisations. Therefore, information officers who are working at PR departments of public establishments in Kwara State were the respondents of the interview. The population of the study was made up of all active registered PR practitioners in Kwara State. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) is the professional body that inducts PR practitioners into the profession in Nigeria. According to available records obtained at the Kwara State NIPR Secretariat, it has one hundred and ninety-five registered PR practitioners, out of which fifty are active members. Active members are those who register and pay annual subscription and participate in the NIPR activities at the state chapter.

According to Cresswell (2014), only manageable and representative sample size but who are information-rich should be considered for the selection. Thus, in the context of this study, ten members were purposively selected from the fifty active members and they serve as a basis upon saturation point is reached for the interview. Using purposive sampling in this study is justified as only the practitioners who had used social media in relation to public relations practice were considered in the study. Semi-structured interview was adopted because they are beneficial as rapport is built between a researcher and informants (Rubin & Babbie, 2015). The data gathered were analysed qualitatively using thematic and modelling approach. To ensure validity and reliability of the study, only active and registered PR practitioners that have information to share regarding their experiences following social media adoption are carefully selected.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS



The data are presented according to the research questions of the study. The responses from the informants are presented and discussed under the two major themes: motives for social media use and challenges encountered while using the platforms. Through thematic analysis, data are triangulated with findings of extant studies on the adoption of social media by the practitioners.

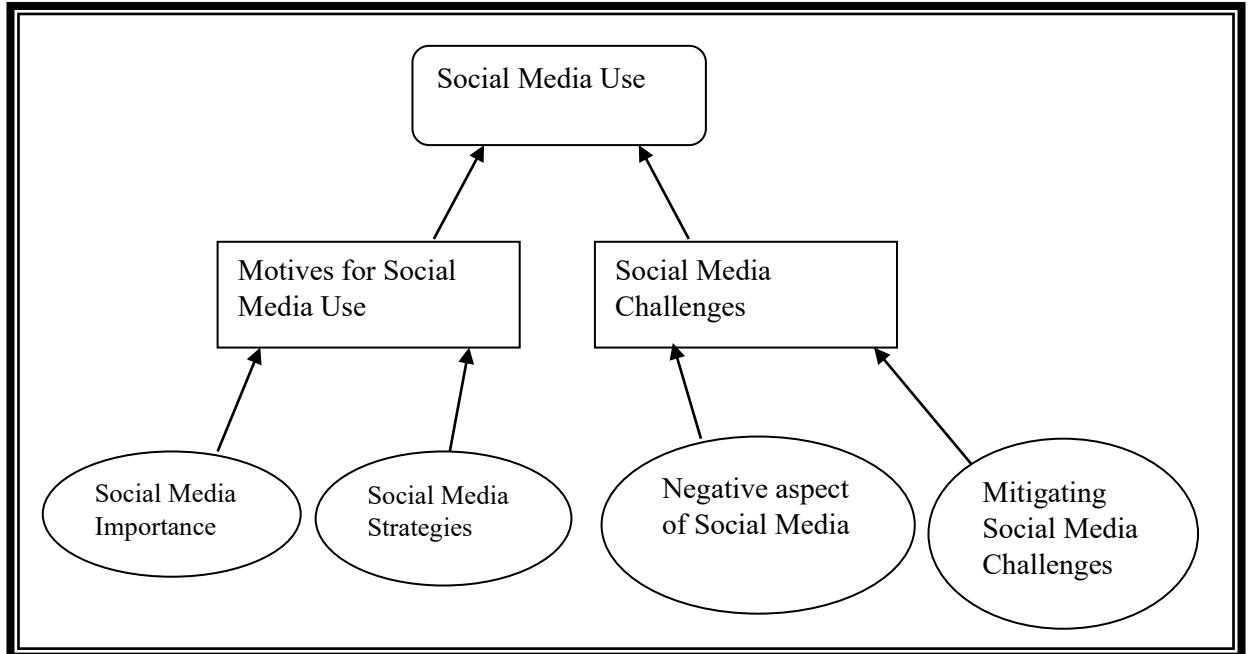


Figure 1: Emerged Themes of Social Media Use and challenges among PR Practitioners

Motives for Social Media Use

The first theme focused on providing answers on the motives of using social media by PR practitioners. Responses from informants provide detailed explanation to different reasons for the adoption of social media tools. Informants agreed that the technology enables them to engage on interactivity, immediate feedback and mutual relationships. The motives theme is further sub-themed into two including importance of social media and strategies of engaging publics as captured in Figure 2.

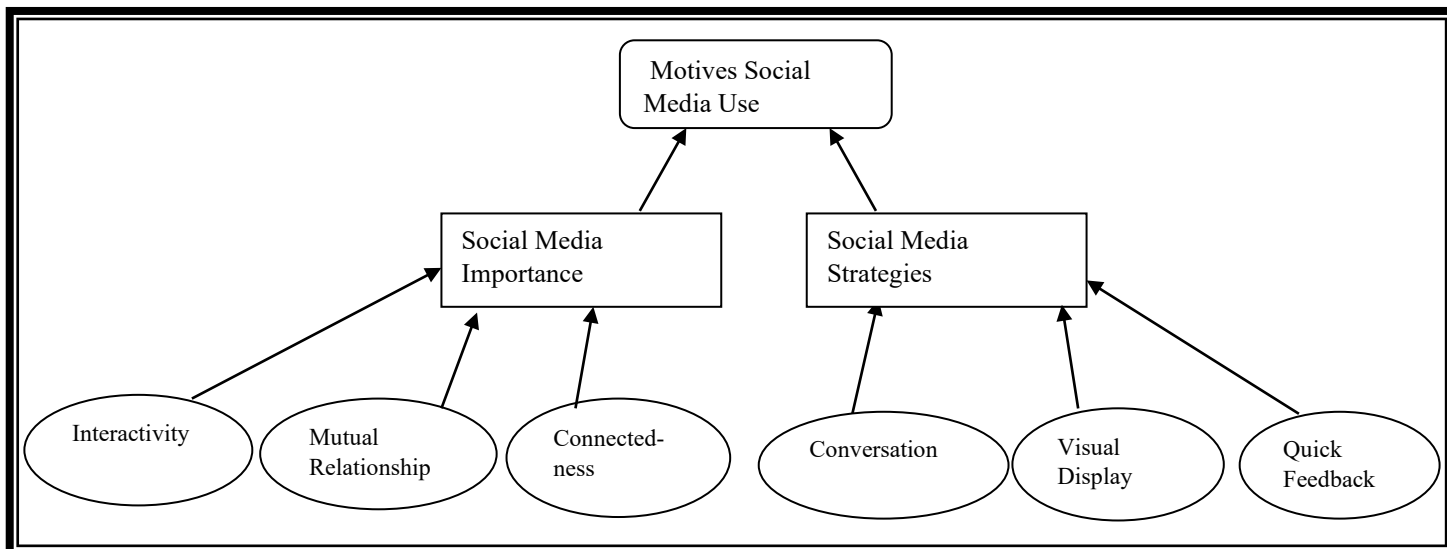




Figure 2: Emerged Themes of Motives for Social Media Use

Importance of Social Media

Under this sub-theme, informants' responses are analysed based on the perceived usefulness of social media adoption among PR practitioners. The informants' perception of the potentials of social media is one of the motivating factors for their usage of sites. In view of this, some of the importance as suggested by the informants are analysed under the following categories:

(a) Interactivity: The myriad of benefits attached to social media technology inherently, it worth noting that the two-way symmetrical model seeks to establish mutual relationship between an organisation and its publics. However, limitations abound with the traditional media used at that time (Taylor, 2002) attracts several number of PR practitioners around the globe to the use of social media. So, communication mostly end up in two-way asymmetric, a problem which social media can solve (Wang, 2015). This exactly was echoed by some informants of the study as many of them adopted social media to facilitate interactivity, mutual relationship, public engagement and feedback opportunities (*Informant 1, Informant 2, Informant 4, Informant 5, Informant 7 and Informant 8*). For example, Informant 2 justified the adoption by saying that "if there is a need to build networked communities, you need social media. So, we engage our stakeholders on social media."

(b) Mutual relationship: The need to achieve mutual relationship between an organisation and its publics often necessitates having an active corporate PR department. Hence, it is the fulfillment of this desire by organisations that led to social media adoption which is often lacking in traditional mainstream media. To that end, five informants who participated in the interview suggested that social media facilitate mutual relationship between them and some of their publics. For example, Informant 9 said that "social media create room for interaction with the audience and assist in sampling their opinions on issues that affect an organisation or individual." Studies (e.g., Luo & Jang, 2012; Grunig, 2009) have suggested that social media are effective in building and maintaining relationships between organisations and their stakeholders.

(c) Connectedness: With social media, dialogic form of conversation has come to realities. This is the understanding of *Informant 3, Informant 5, Informant 6 and Informant 8*. For instance, *Informant 5* captures it thus:

It is all about the global trend. More so, the speed and high interconnectivity of the social media networks are of great values to engaging the public on social media. For marketing and crisis communication, social media greatly assist in achieving faster speed to market and reaching out to our stakeholders.

Though when dialogic PR theory was proposed, social media was not around. The model has become a reality as organisations are increasingly utilising the media to interact with their publics (Wang, 2015).

Strategies for Social Media Engagements



The need to bring the public back is one of the motives why organisations adopt social media. Hence, the media have broken the barriers of distance, location, proximity, time and space. As a result, PR practitioners in Nigeria are engaging with their publics through social media. Some of the strategies as identified by the informants include conversation, dissemination of visuals and quick feedback. The sub-themes are discussed in turn.

(a) Conversation: Social media enable immediate conversation in real-time. Informant 2 states that “one of the reasons why social media are more preferable is that they can be used to start conversation at any point in time. You get feedback on a content you share or an issue which affects your organisation.”

(b) Dissemination of visuals: According to *Informant 1*, social media allow PR practitioners to relate with their publics by engaging them by uploading audio-visual materials. These are more effective content strategies as they are used to create and sustain users' interests. Pictures and videos are capable of presenting ideas or events better.

(c) Quick feedback: Through social media, feedbacks are instantaneously received by PR practitioners in real-time according to a majority of the informants. This allows them to be in picture of what their publics are saying about the organisations online. For instance, *Informant 10* points out that: “One of the strengths of social media is that they have the potential to give you hint about the effectiveness or otherwise of your campaign or PR practices.”

In essence, through quick feedback, relationships are built while suspicions are clarified immediately they are noticed on social media by PR practitioners. This is an indication that public relations practitioners are proactive in their social media use.

Challenges Encountered while using Social Media

The second theme explored challenges hindering gratifications PR practitioners enjoy while using social media platforms in facilitating their professional responsibilities. The responses from the interviews showed that the practitioners were faced with the issue of trust, identity, believability, competence, reliability, technical knowledge and control. Though social media came with a huge promise to public relations profession just as it did to other professions, the speed of the changes and the quest to adopt social media tools and its dynamics to organised profession such as PR has been a challenge.

In view of this, all the informants agreed that the spread of unverifiable information, slander, deliberate falsehood, hackers and difficulty in controlling a post pose serious challenges in managing an organisation's internal and external communication crises. Challenges faced in using social media for PR practices, in the context of this study, is analysed under two sub-themes: negative impacts and strategies for mitigating crises. The sub-themes are discussed in the next paragraphs.

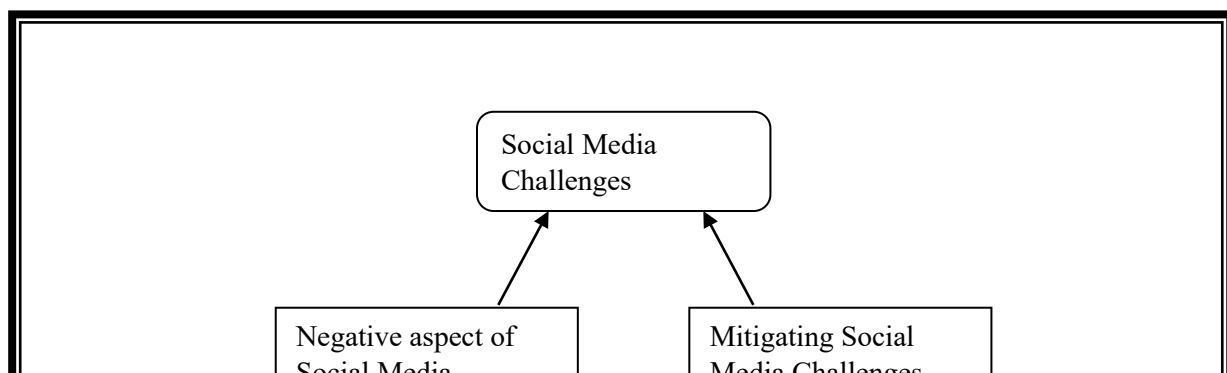




Figure 3: Emerged Themes of Social Media Challenges

Negative aspects of social media

The negative aspect of social media has been a challenge to PR practitioners, especially when it comes to the issue of controlling an unrestricted flow of audience. The other issue bothers on irreversible nature of information on social media. *Informant 3* captures it thus:

Negative aspect right now is not regulated and this has led to an increase in the spread of fake news. It has become something like trauma for PR practitioners. For now, there is no effective control mechanism yet. For that reason, people could be misinformed through social media; they could blackmail other people; they could slander and so on and so forth. They could also propagate fake and inaugurate news, as opposed traditional media where you have a fact-checking mechanism through which you verify a piece of information. There are gatekeepers like editors and proofreaders who will fact-check stories before they are published.

The gamut of low-quality contents on social media, according to several studies (Zhang 2013), have made social media susceptible to misuse among users. Hence, public relations practitioners are expected to be wary of this challenge and develop coping strategy to counter negative aspects of the platforms.

(a) Lack of control: Because entering into social media is very easy and flexible, it makes organisation to find it difficult in controlling the flow of entering. Sometimes, they just have to maintain close group. Informants noted that the continued spread of unverified information, slander, deliberate falsehood, as well as the act of hacking social media accounts are all difficult to control thus posing a challenge to the practitioners. This is consistent with McCarkindale and Wright's (2011) finding that the most common challenge for the practitioners is the lack of control associated with social media and not knowing what people might say or do.

Besides, the practitioners (*Informant 2, Informant 4, Informant 5, Informant 7, Informant 8, and Informant 9*) also observed that the anonymity of information source on social media makes content control on the platforms difficult. This claim made by the practitioners has earlier been posited by McCarkindale and Wright (2011)'s who suggested that the inability of practitioners to identify some sources of information online pose a risk in managing internal and external communication crises.



(b) Irreversible Information: As organisations are exposed to attack online, crisis management becomes more difficult for the practitioners. The rate at which information spread online often makes misinformation to reach both intended and unintended audience in jiffy. Informant 10 describes it thus:

The negative aspect of social media is just the word-of-mouth. When you make utterance, as soon as it leaves your mouth, you cannot take it back. Social media posts are like that too. Once you click a send button, you do not have control over it as people who are your friends online would have helped you to share or forward across several social media platforms. Recalling a message which has been sent on any social network is often impossible even if you delete it. This is because a lot of people would have made a screenshot of the post.

Considering the mercurial nature of social media, recalling any post which has ready been shared may be difficult, if not impossible, as public relations practitioners do not have control over a post once shared on a platform. Thus, public relations practitioners, in deploying social media for their campaigns, should be strategic and conscious of spreading and controlling damaging information about their organisations online.

Mitigating the Challenges

In dealing with the challenges posed by social media adoption among the practitioners, they have devised various means through which they cope with some of the issues. In the context of this study, Informants identified two coping strategies, namely, close monitoring and verifiable information.

(a) Close Monitoring: Considering the ease-of-use of and accessibility to several social media platforms by people across socio-economic strata, it, therefore, becomes, necessary for the practitioners to be proactive by monitoring public opinions as it relates to issues that affect or concern their organisations. However, lack of control and anonymity of sources also make it difficult to achieve trust on social media. In fact, Informant 7 was of the view that "considering the high rate of fake news and other damaging information about organisations online, the call for social media regulation among some stakeholders are justified. Speaking further on measures put in place to address some of the challenges, Informant 5 suggests that:

PR practitioners must always monitor the social media space and anticipate attacks and have a plan to deal with crises when they occur. Close monitoring of online space would afford you the opportunity to respond promptly. Organisation's image is always under attack either for right or wrong reasons.

In the same vein, Informant 3 emphasised that the practitioners should visit their social media page regularly while unguarded contents are screen out. By so doing, public confidence would be restored.

(b) Verifiable information: Another strategy being adopted among the practitioners in dealing with misinformation, fake news and scandalous contents on social media is making verifiable claims. All the informants agreed that one of the effective means is the fact that they use their official social media handles to share or forward messages on issues that affect their organisations. Also, they refrain from using their social networking sites to share controversial issues, which are not in any way related or that has no immediate or remote impact on the organisations. According to *Informant 2*:



As an organisation's image maker, whenever a misleading repost surfaces online, I ensure that the position of my organisation regarding that matter is promptly shared across several social media platforms. It is even important that whatever post I am sharing on behalf of the organisation is approved by the higher authority so that one would not appear confused or uncoordinated. We do not use platforms to comment on issues that have direct or indirect consequence on our organisation's reputation.

In view of the claims made by the informants in respect of sharing verifiable information about their organisations, this is in line with the principle of excellent public relations which emphasise exchange of quality information between organisations and their publics (Gruning, 2009). The extent to which an organisation deploys its social media platforms for crisis communication has been found to have an influence on degree of impact such crisis would have on the organisation's reputation (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The emergence of social media bring about with it opportunities and challenges to PR practice. As a result, the usage of social media has revolutionalised and still revolutionising the practice, most especially by promoting symmetrical dialogues between organisations and their stakeholders. Based on the findings, it is evident that members of the NIPR who are working in public organisations are innovative with their adoption of social media for professional duties. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, and the likes are facilitating fast and quality engagements between organisations and their stakeholders. Though the media are enhancing professionalism among the practitioners. There are obvious challenges which have to do with trust, lack of control on communication and crisis that the practitioners have to deal with for them to embark on successful PR.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, it is, therefore, recommended that more studies should explore the influence of other variables such as self-efficacy, socio-economic influence, availability of enabling technological devices on the adoption of social media among the practitioners. Also, this study has a relatively small sample size as its limitation, while the phenomenon is investigated only on 10 active PR practitioners who are working in public organisations. In addition, further studies should be done on motivations for the adoption of social media on a larger sample size.

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