

**WORKING WITH THE SOCIAL MEDIA: A SURVEY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE OF
TWO LEADING MULTINATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The arrival of social media no doubt redefined the way things are done in almost every sphere of life; public relation is not an exemption. Owing to the strategic position of multinational companies globally, it becomes increasingly important that they catch up with these new technological realities, especially in their public relations departments. The reason for this being that the interactive nature of social media offers organisations and PR professionals the opportunity to reach their teeming publics and at the same time be reached more effectively. Anchored on the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations, the study posed three research questions which include the following: to what extent do Coca-Cola and Nestlé employ social media in their public relation effort? What strategies characterise the use of social media for PR by Coca-Cola and Nestlé? What is the extent of audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé? The researchers adopted a survey design and had a sample size of 400 respondents. The findings of the study revealed the following: that Coca-Cola and Nestlé employed social media for public relations purposes, that the platforms employed by these organisations included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, while the PR messages came in the form of news of company events, press releases/announcements, information about product/brand, and invitation to like page. Furthermore it was revealed that in using social media for PR, Coca-Cola and Nestlé adopted strategies that involved projecting their images and finally that audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé was significantly low and that regularity of exposure was also low among those that were exposed to the messages.

Keywords: Public Relations, Social media, multinational companies.

INTRODUCTION

The very important role of public relations in the success of organizations can never be overemphasized. It might be interesting to note that these roles have been amply documented over the years (Ogbu, 2019; Oluwasola, Madoc & Ibitoye, 2017). The implication of the above is that it is always in the best interest of every organisation to leverage on the best practices of PR to achieve maximum success. However, one redefining aspect of the contemporary best practices in public relations is the increasing influence of social media as a tool for engaging publics. Anecdotal evidence has continued to demonstrate that this new communication channel is significantly reshaping the philosophy and strategies for success in public relations (Awofadeju & Ewuola, 2019; El-Kasim, Mukhtar & Idid, 2017; Dominick, 2009).

Over the years, there has been persistent scholarly interest in the organisational strategies of multinational corporations whose local presence is crucial to Nigeria's economic wellbeing (Ewubare & Udofia, 2018;

Odunlami & Awolusi, 2015). In particular, studies have focused on the public relations, advertising and general marketing strategies of these transnational entities with findings suggesting that adopting competitive business strategies is crucial to their success (Wokemezie, Okon & Udoudo, 2019; Amodu, 2018; Nto, 2017; Onwuka, 2016). However, the need to also examine the place of social media as a potentially critical component of these strategies prompted survey on use of social media for public relations by two of Nigeria's leading multinational corporations; Coca-Cola and Nestlé.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The social media has no doubt brought about a plethora of digital transformations for both public relation practice and the professionals (Uzuegbunam, 2015). Today it is accepted that adopting social media-driven public relations is a crucial step for organisational success. However, a number of organisations have been observed to have embraced the trend, it is also the case that merely adopting social media tools will not automatically result in success, as such organisations ought to also match these tools with the necessary strategies for optimal result (Inya, 2017; Bhargava, 2010). Hence, while Coca-Cola and Nestlé may have, like most other firms, adopted social media for public relations, it remains to be seen how much it has complemented this with requisite strategies that will ensure best results.

In addition, it appears scholars have focused largely on the extent and result of use of social media for public relations in Nigeria (Awofadeju & Ewuola, 2019; Inya, 2017; Achor, Nwachukwu & Nkwocha, 2015), they have paid little attention to the nature of the use process itself. This therefore limits understanding of the role of social media in public relations by organisations including multinational corporations. Consequently, this study becomes necessary.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is particularly to investigate the use of social media by two multinational corporations in Nigeria, Coca-Cola and Nestlé. In more specific terms, the following objectives were pursued:

1. To discover the extent Coca-Cola and Nestlé employ social media in their public relations;
2. To ascertain the strategies characterising the use of social media for PR by Coca-Cola and Nestlé
3. To assess the extent of audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé; and

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are formulated:

1. To what extent do Coca-Cola and Nestlé employ social media in their public relations?
2. What strategies characterise the use of social media for PR by Coca-Cola and Nestlé?
3. What is the extent of audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multinational Corporation and the Nigeria

The growth of multinational corporations at the end of Second World War became imperative in order to rebuild the war torn countries of the world. Although it is on record that a large number of transactional business organisations predated the 20th century, most of their activities became prominent from the 1940s downwards (Odunlami & Awolusi, 2015). These multinational firms began to experience remarkable growth and exerting corresponding influence on the economy, politics and culture of the various host nations (Kim & Milner, 2019; Igben, 2016).

In the recent time, multinational corporations can no longer be ignored either by individual nations or the global community given their massive influence. Kim and Milner (2019) comments on this influence thus:

... MNCs throughout the world dominate the global economy as well as their national economies... [They] account for half of global exports, nearly a third of world GDP (28%), and about fourth of global employment. These firms all generate a significant share of their revenue from abroad as well. Importantly, their transnational activities have transformed the nature of international trade, investments, and technology transfers in the era of globalization. The extensive global value chains (GVCs) prevalent in today's world economy have been driven by how MNCs structure their global operations through outsourcing and offshoring activities. In fact, their decisions have enormous implications for a wide range of policy issues such as taxation, investment protection; immigration across many countries with different political and economic institutions.

In Nigeria, the influence of multinational corporations has not been less significant. From the onset, the economy of the nation, in the modern context, was kick-started by the early activities of foreign multinational companies like the Royal Niger Company and the United Africa Company (UAC) following the abolition of slave trade in the 19th century. These companies were involved first in trading and later manufacturing (Nwangwu, 2018). A good number of studies have revealed that multinational corporations have contributed to the economic development of Nigeria through direct and indirect job creation, capital formation and growth of the GDP (Ewubare & Udofia, 2018; Eluka, Ndubuisi-Okolo & Anekwe, 2016). For instance, Ewubare and Udofia (2018) found that they have proved to be key determinants of economic growth in both oil and agricultural sectors. Similarly, an Economic Impact Survey made by the American Business Council showed that American multinational corporations created over three million jobs in Nigeria in barely one year (Adesoji, 2020).

However, it is not all positives for these multinational companies. They have also come to bear the burden of accusations of many wrongdoings, including undue economic, political and cultural influence. They have been accused of economic exploitations especially in the context of the developing world-developed world economic dependency, political meddlesomeness, environmental degradation and cultural imperialism (Igben, 2016; Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004).

In spite of all this, however, every nation desires and in fact works for the survival and growth of multinational corporations operating in its territory, and Nigeria has never been an exception. Hence, recent trends of multinational corporations reducing their presence or completely leaving the Nigerian territory have been of great economic concern to the government (Bakare, 2019). This has been the case with companies like PZ, UNILEVER, and Shoprite which have all been rumoured to have planned divestment or outright exit (Eboh, 2020; Bakare, 2019).

In the midst of all this, the multinational corporations would have to strengthen their business strategies including the marketing component of this – comprising, among others, advertising and public relations. On public relations, scholars are agreed that it constitutes a key component of the integrated marketing strategies of multinational corporations (Onwuka, 2016; Quinn-Allan, 2011).

Essentially, the PR activities of these multinational entities should take cognizance of the transnational character of the economic, cultural, legal and political environment they are operating in. This approach to PR is what is known as international public relations (Igben, 2016; Verčič, Zeffass & Wiesenber, 2015). Practitioners who plan and implement public relations at this level ought to appreciate the myriad complexities of the international sphere including cultures, political systems, media, and other tendencies that influence these organisations (Wakefield, 1997). Very importantly, in pursuing their public relations programmes, multinational corporations must come to terms with the reality that online and digital technologies have radically transformed methods and practices of PR (Phillips & Brabham, 2012; Postman, 2008). Discussing this impact, Bhargava (2010) avers that the Internet has had more impact on society and

organisations than any previously known communication channels. In particular, social media, more than ever, has placed two-way interactive communication at the service of public relations. This is besides other advantages it has brought into PR in the area of speed of message delivery, message reach, cost, and multimedia communication (Phillips & Brabham, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2009; Adamolekun & Ekundayo, 2002).

On the other hand, social media poses some challenges to public relations. First is that the practitioners' traditional power of control over the communication process is now being seriously challenged by the audience's power to rapidly reply to posts as well as initiate their own posts. Further, the PR practitioner may this time struggle to manage communication flow given the phenomenal increase in the quantity and speed of message flow as occasioned by the Internet and social media (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015; Inya, 2017; Oneya, 2010).

However, it is the ability of an organisation to contain these challenges attendant on using social media for public relations while harnessing the opportunities thereof that will ultimately determine how much gain it will derive from adopting this innovation. This study is, therefore, concerned with evaluating how Coca-Cola and Nestlé, two leading multinational corporations, may have performed in this regard.

The Importance of Public Relations in Multinationals Corporation (MNCs)

A number of studies have been conducted in ascertaining the role **public** relations in the operation of multinational corporations (Wokemezie, Okon & Udoudo, 2019; Amodu, 2018; Onwuka, 2016; Igben, 2016). These firms typically engage in what is known as international public relations. International PR is an approach to public relations wherein an organisation tries to build and sustain a mutually beneficial relationship between her and her publics in more than one nation (Verčič, Zerfass & Wiesenberg, 2015). It is public relations executed at a multinational level.

In most developing nations including Nigeria, multinational corporations have been seen as potential agents of neocolonialism (Osugwu & Ezie, 2013; Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). They have been accused of playing some role in ensuring economic dependency on developed countries including through repatriation of profit leading to capital flight, and slowing down development of local expertise and technology by foisting reliance on foreign expertise and technology.

Thus, while multinational corporations obviously contribute greatly to growth of their host nations, they typically walk a tight rope in terms of maintaining a positive corporate image and public goodwill. For this reason, the need for sustained public relations campaign by these firms cannot be over-emphasised (Igben, 2016; Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). Given their huge influence in the economic, environmental, political and cultural spheres of their host nations, multinational corporations differ from other business entities in terms of the extent of stake members of the public have in their operation. In other words, they are expected to show a much greater commitment to social responsibility principles (Amao, 2007). In fact, corporations that are based in European countries are viewed as social institutions as against strictly private business entities. Therefore, Amao (2007) contends that it is time Nigeria changed its culture of treating such businesses as strictly private institutions given the enormous social impact of their activities. This enormity of their social impact demands that so much will be expected of them in terms of public accountability.

However, some business environments may prove particularly difficult and hostile for multinational corporations due to special circumstances of political, economic or cultural nature (Igben, 2016; Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). The experience of Shell BP, a multinational oil corporation, in Ogoni land of Rivers State is a classic domestic example. Other multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta region have equally had their own fair share of environmental hostility stemming from mutually connected issues of economic, political, and ecological colouration (Amodu, 2018; Igben, 2016; Ihedioha & Husar, 2014). Bardhan and

Patwardhan (2004, p.251) observe that when “it comes to such resistant environments; MNCs (multinational corporations) need to be careful in how they conduct their public relations activities”

In a nutshell, it could be affirmed that while every organisation requires some form of public relations, multinational corporations, given the peculiarity of their business environment, are in special need of public relations. Further, the scope and character of this environment demands a special approach to public relations wherein an organisations ought to reckon with cultural diversity as a key variable that should define and guide their strategy (Igben, 2016; Wakefield, 1997).

Social Media and Public Relations: A co-penetration

Defining public relations has not been a straightforward task. This is because the field has drawn and continues to draw on concepts, principles and practices from various fields which include media, communication, management, marketing and psychology (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015). Bhargava (2010) notes that the pioneer of PR education, Rex Harlow, examined almost 500 definitions of public relations before concluding that it “is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its public” (p.2). Citing Cutlip, Center and Broom Bhargava (2010) further observes that public relations is about managing problems and issues. It enables an organisation’s management to be aware of and efficiently respond to public opinion, fulfil its responsibility of serving public interest, and be in a position to understand change and anticipate trends. In a nutshell, public relations is the principles and practice of pursuing a sustained cordial and mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and its publics.

By virtue of its philosophy and goal, of public relations would ideally thrive on two-way communication, as an organisation aims at understanding and being understood by its publics. Stated differently, public relations involves both communicating and listening. According to Igbe (2003), by listening to its publics, an organisation can evaluate their opinion about its policies and activities. Through such listening, it is able to gauge how positive or negative its public image is at any given time as well as ascertain factors responsible for such image. It is through such knowledge that the organisation will be in a good position to implement measures required for effective image management. These measures may include change or amendment of policies and activities or strengthening of existing ones when these are found favourable. In the same vein, an organisation will also have some messages for its publics and which they should listen to. Thus, public relations is ideally an interactive process. The foregoing therefore underlines the continuously two-way orientation of PR communication without which an organisation may find itself distant from its publics, failing to understand their feelings and perceptions.

This imperative of interactivity in public relations definitely underscores the place of social media in PR. Social media offer invaluable resources for two-way communication in a continuous and flexible manner such that an organisation is able to obtain regular feedback on its communication, policies and programmes. Hence, as noted by Achor, Nwachukwu and Nkwocha (2015), social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs and You Tube among others have remained an integral part of PR media strategy. The authors further observe that a consensus now exists among communication practitioners that the role of the traditional (“old”) media of communication in public relations has been so redefined that their use in PR campaigns now ought to take cognizance of the complementary role of social media and other ICT resources. Thus, Inya (2017) avers that social media has altered corporate communications patterns, changing the manner in which PR campaigns are formulated, disseminated and evaluated. Prior to this time, audience engagement in public relations was exclusively done via print and electronic media. Then, PR publicity campaign was basically concerned with getting decent TV, radio and newspaper coverage. However, with a growing majority of Internet users coming on social media, these interactive platforms have provided for PR practitioners a unique opportunity to for information gathering, public opinion monitoring, and dialoguing with their publics on various issues of concern (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In fact, PR practitioners are fast adopting social media as an integral part of their campaign, especially given that the complementary

relationship between social media and traditional media has progressively blurred the lines between online and offline campaigns (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008, as cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The famous declaration by Solis and Breakenridge (2009) as cited in Ogbu (2019) that “social media put the public back in public relations” vividly reflects the vital position social media has assumed in modern PR practice. This declaration also embodies the wide optimism and excitement sweeping through the industry about social media’s potential to unprecedentedly transform public relations.

Social Media and Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

Social media has a huge potential to dictate the present and future trajectory of public relations in Nigeria. This is simply for the reason that it is strongly gaining ground as a popular means of communication. As at December 31, 2019, 126, 078, 999 Internet users existed in Nigeria representing 61.2% of the population (Internet World Stats, 2020). Also, 28.15 million Nigerians were connected to social media in 2020, and out of this number, 27, 120, 000 used Facebook (Internet World Stats, 2020). Furthermore, 44.63 million are projected to get connected to social media by 2025 (Statista, 2020).

Smartphone, which is the major means of Internet connection among the population, is tremendously growing in accessibility and use among the populace. By 2025, about 140 million people will be using smartphones in Nigeria. Currently, the number of users is put at between 25 and 40 million (O’Dea, 2020). All this statistics points to the growing influence of social media in Nigeria, implying a corresponding influence as a means of communication and engagement in public relations. Ogbu (2019) captures this reality when he remarks that the social media culture has led to the emergence of “a target audience that is more influenced by social relationships and experiences than by asymmetrical press releases”. With precise reference to how this new trend is emerging in Nigeria Ogbu (2019) states:

The growth in the use of the internet and mobile phones in Nigeria has, to a great extent, accelerated the adaptation of the social media as the modern village square, where people converge to exchange goods and services as well as share interests and information. Assisted by smart phones, media convergence and the advances in digital technology, Nigerians are becoming very active producers and critical consumers of content.

To engage the audience of this disposition, one should ideally employ channels that are interactive and relationship-oriented. This summarises the place of social media-driven public relations in the Nigeria of today.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that while many organisations in the country have integrated social media in their public relations processes, not many have actually maximized its advantages (Awofadeju & Ewuola, 2019; Inya, 2017). Inya (2017) observes the apparent lack of a good understanding of how much contribution social media can make to public relations among local practitioners. The author argues that some PR practitioners, either as a result of ignorance or sheer laid-back attitude, seem to utilise social media platforms only as a communication channel thereby marginalising other crucial uses such as research and monitoring of trends.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dialogic Theory of Public Relations

The Dialogic Theory of public relations as developed by Kent and Taylor (1998) posits that the Internet offers an opportunity for organisations to build true discourse between themselves and their publics. The theory further affirms that the terms “dialogue” and “dialogic” are becoming recognized, both in the industry and academics, as a crucial element of ethical and practical approaches to communication.

For Kent and Taylor (1998), the Dialogic Theory is underpinned by the concept of “dialogic communication”, which refers to a form of interaction occurring in a situation where a relationship already exists. The authors adopted the views of Johannesen (1974) which suggest that dialogue is intrinsically connected with values like “honest concern for the audience, genuineness, open-mindedness, empathy, lack of pretense, non-manipulative intent, and encouragement of free expression” (Achor *et al.*, 2015, p.1699). Hence, Dialogic Theory argues that organizations should be willing to interact with publics in a sincere and ethical manner so as to bring about effective organisation-publics communication channels (Wang, 2015).

Earlier, Pearson (as cited in Achor *et al.*, 2015) identifies the three measures necessary for facilitating dialogue. They are

- i. That no topic should be excluded from discussion,
- ii. That no type of communication be considered a priori as inappropriate or irrational, and
- iii. That during discourse, communicators have the option of changing levels of reflexivity

Kent and Taylor (2002, p.33) note that all members of an organisation who communicate the publics of the organisation must be comfortable engaging in dialogues. According to the authors, skills necessary for realising dialogic communication include: listening, empathy, ability to contextualize issues within local, national and international frameworks, ability to identify common grounds between parties, long-term as against short-term thinking, identifying groups or individuals with opposing viewpoints, and soliciting various internal and external opinions on policy issues. They further observe that while dialogue “cannot guarantee ethical public relations outcomes, a dialogic communication orientation does increase the likelihood that publics and organizations will better understand each other and have ground rules for communication”

Evidently, social media is oriented towards dialogue given its interactive features. Therefore, its use for public relations tends to align with the principles of the Dialogic Theory. Stated differently, the dialogic orientation of social media platforms tends to situate them as ideal for realizing public relations engagement based on the tenets enunciated by the Dialogic Theory of PR.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted by this study was the survey research design. According to Babbie (2010, p.85) “a survey design is an excellent method for measuring attitude and opinion of people within a large population”. This research design therefore entails asking the respondents about their opinion on the subject matter.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study comprises the PR executives of Nestle Nigeria and Coca-Cola Nigeria and the residents of the South East Nigeria. Data from the National Population Commission (2018) indicate the South East residents numbered 26, 047, 536, as at May, 2018.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The researchers selected respondents relying on the scale of sample size adequacy suggested by Comrey and Lee (1992): where 500 is described as “very good”.

The multi stage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents across the states. The first stage selected five metropolitan areas from South East Nigeria. These cities comprise Aba, Onitsha, Abakiliki, Enugu and Owerri. At the second stage, the researchers chose Local Governments from the different metropolis selected at the first stage, for Aba metropolis, Aba North LGA was selected through a random table of numbers, for Enugu metropolis, Enugu North LGA was also randomly selected, for Owerri metropolis, the researchers randomly selects Owerri municipal, similarly, for Onitsha metropolis; the researcher randomly selects Onitsha South LGA. Lastly, Abakiliki LGA was automatically selected. At the third stage, four wards were randomly selected from each of the five selected LGA’s. From Aba North, the

researchers selected Industrial Area, Ogbor Hill I, Ezizma and Osusu I. From Onitsha South, Bridge Head, Fegge I, Fegge II and Odoakpu III were selected. Also from Abakiliki, LGA, the researchers selected Azumini/ Azugwu Layout, Azuiyikwu Layout, Timber Shade and Azuiyudene Layout. From Enugu North LGA, the researchers selected, Onu Asata, Independence Layout, GRA and New Heaven. And lastly, from Owerri Municipal LGA, Aladimma II, New Owerri II, Ikenegbu I and Ikenegbu II were selected amounting to 20 wards. The fourth stage, which is the residential stage, the researchers made use of the 2006 housing enumeration records to select 25 residential houses from the 20 selected wards. This yielded 500 residential units. The fifth stage of the sampling is the residential unit level, at this level, the researchers made use of the accident sampling procedure to select one respondent from each of the selected houses (accident sampling is a sampling method whereby the researcher will administer questionnaire to the first person found at any house). This therefore summed up to 500 respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The data analysis and presentation was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. The data so obtained was presented in charts and statistical tables. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed for data management and analysis.

RESPONSE RATE

Out of the 500 questionnaires shared about 476 representing 95.2% of the population was recovered. However, 24 copies of the questionnaires (4.8%) were not recovered.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

The data analyzed in the demographic section of the questionnaire indicates that a greater percentage, (58.4%) were males, while 41.6% were females. Furthermore, about 32.8% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-28 years, 29.6% were within the age range 29-39 years, about 2.8% of them fell within the ages of 40-49 years and 15.8% of them were in the ages of 50 years and above. In addition, about 55.0% of the respondents are single, 35.1% are married; 3.8% are separated, 4.8% are divorced and about 1.3% of the respondents are widowed. For educational qualification, 4.0% have First School Leaving Certificate, 32.8% have SSCE, 17.2% HAVE OND/NCE/Pre-Degree Diploma, 36.5% have First Degree/HND and about 11.6% of them have Postgraduate qualifications. Similarly, about 25.8% of the respondents are Civil servants, 26.5% of them are professionals, 10.7% of them are teachers, 9.2% are artisans and farmers, 12.2% of the respondents are students 7.4% are traders and about 8.2% fall within the category of “others”

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent do Coca-Cola and Nestlé employ social media in their public relations? To answer question 1 the researchers made use of tables 1 2 and 3

Table 1
Social Media Channels Exposed to by Respondents

Response	Facebook	WhatsApp	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	Others
Yes	90.1%	92.2%	81.7%	87.6%	82.8%	39.1%
	N = 429	N = 439	N = 389	N = 417	N = 394	N = 186
No	4.2%	2.1%	12.6%	6.7%	11.6%	55.3%
	N = 20	N = 10	N = 60	N = 3216	N = 55	N = 263
No	5.7%	5.7%	5.7%	5.7%	5.7%	5.7%
Answer	N = 27	N = 27	N = 27	N = 27	N = 27	N = 27
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476

Table 1 shows the particular social media channels the respondents were exposed to. Data in the table indicate that a little over 90% of the respondents were exposed to Facebook and WhatsApp, while over 80%

were exposed to Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Apart from showing high level of social media access among the respondents – a fact already established in literature in relation to Nigeria (Internet World Stats, 2022) – the pre-eminent popularity enjoyed by Facebook and WhatsApp in the country is also reflected. Facebook, which is the most popular social media platform in the world (Internet World Stats, 2022), is also the most used in Nigeria while WhatsApp comes as the second most used (Cecil, 2021)

Table 2
Coca-Cola Social Media Messages Exposed to by Respondents

Exposure	Press release/ announcement	News of company event	Information about product/brand	Invitation to like page	Others
Yes	18.5% N = 88	20.8% N = 99	15.5% N = 74	7.4% N = 35	1.9% N = 9
No	11.1% N = 53	8.2% N = 39	12.4% N = 59	22.5% N = 107	27.9% N = 133
No Answer	70.4% N = 335	71.0% N = 338	70.2% N = 334	70.2% N = 334	70.2% N = 334
Total	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476

Table 2 indicates the nature of Coca-Cola social media messages the respondents were exposed to. Data show that news of company event came tops with 20.8% followed by press release/announcement at 18.5%. Information about product/brand stood at 15.5% while invitation to like page came last at 7.4%. The high frequency of “no answer” is a reflection of the large number that indicated non-exposure to Coca-Cola social media messages added to the number that said they did not have social media access at all. Hence news of company event, press release/announcement, and information about product/brand stood almost at par (with not so much separating them). The fact that news of company event stood out as number one reflects the pattern found by the researchers on the YouTube channel Coca-Cola where most of the videos were about events held by the company.

Table 3
Nestlé Social Media Messages Exposed to by Respondents

Response	Press release/ announcement	News of company event	Information about product/brand	Invitation to like page	Others
Yes	35.9% N = 171	38.9% N = 185	42.6% N = 203	31.5% N = 150	14.1% N = 67
No	6.7% N = 32	3.8% N = 18	0% N = 0	11.1% N = 53	28.6% N = 136
No Answer	57.4% N = 273	57.4% N = 273	57.4% N = 273	57.4% N = 273	54.7% N = 273
Total	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476

Table 3 indicates the nature of Nestlé social media messages the respondents were exposed to. Data show that information about product/brand event came tops with 42.6%, followed by news of company event at 38.9%, press release/announcement at 35.9%, and then invitation to like page at 31.5%. Information about product/brand stood at 15.5% while invitation to like page came last at 7.4%. The high frequency of “no answer” is a reflection of the large number that indicated non-exposure to Nestlé social media messages

added to the number that said they did not have social media access at all. Unlike with Coca-Cola, “invitation to like page” occurred significantly, while information about product/brand was the most recurring.

Table 4
Respondents’ Medium of Exposure to Nestlé Social Media Messages

Response	Facebook	WhatsApp	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	Others
Yes	18.3%	12.4%	30.9%	37.2%	1.9%	4.6%
	N = 87	N = 59	N = 147	N = 177	N = 9	N = 22
No	24.4%	30.3%	11.3%	5.3%	40.8%	37.8%
	N = 116	N = 144	N = 54	N = 25	N = 194	N = 180
No Answer	57.4%	57.4%	57.4%	57.4%	54.7%	57.4%
	N = 273	N = 273	N = 275	N = 274	N = 273	N = 274
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476	N = 476

Table 4 shows the specific social media platforms through which the respondents got exposed to Nestlé social media messages. Data indicate that YouTube topped the list at 37.2%, followed by Twitter at 12.4%, Facebook at 18.3%, and WhatsApp at 12.4%. Instagram came a distant last at 1.9%. Like Coca-Cola, Nestlé at least maintained some presence on these popular social media platforms. How strong or weak such presence might have been is however, a different question.

Based on the foregoing, the first research question is answered by stating that Coca-Cola and Nestlé employed social media for public relations purposes, and that the platforms employed by them included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, while the PR messages came in the form of news of company events, press releases/announcements, information about product/brand, and invitation to like page.

Research Question 2: What strategies characterise the use of social media for PR by Coca-Cola and Nestlé?

Table 5
Respondents’ Evaluation of their Encounter with Coca-Cola Social Media Messages

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very engaging	18	3.8%
Fairly engaging	6	1.3%
Not engaging	101	21.2%
No Answer	351	73.7%
Total	476	100%

Table 5 indicates how the respondents evaluated their experience with Coca-Cola social media messages. Data indicate that majority of those that gave answers to the question found the pages not engaging while only small proportions found them very engaging (3.8%) and fairly engaging (1.3%) respectively.

Table 6
Respondents’ Evaluation of their Experience with Nestlé Social Media Messages

Response	Frequency	Percentage
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Very engaging	22	4.6%
Fairly engaging	19	4.0%
Not engaging	98	20.6%
Can't say	64	13.4%
No Answer	273	57.4%
Total	476	100%

Table 6 indicates how the respondents evaluated their experience with Nestlé social media messages. Data indicate that majority of those that gave answers to the question found the pages not engaging while only small proportions found them very engaging (4.6%) and fairly engaging (4%) respectively.

Table 7
Respondents' Engagement with Coca-Cola Social Media Messages

Response	Have you ever shared such news, press release, announcement or any other form of Coca-Cola messages	Have you ever commented on such post?	Did your comment draw reply, "like" or any other form of reaction from Coca-Cola	Did your comment draw reply, "like" or any other form of reaction from other social media users?
Several times	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0
A few times	0% N = 0	% N = 11	0% N = 0	3.2% N = 15
Maybe once	3.4% N = 16	2.3% N = 20	0% N = 0	0.4% N = 2
Never	26.9% N = 128	22.9% N = 109	6.5% N = 31	2.9% N = 14
No Answer	69.7% N = 332	70.6% N = 336	93.5% N = 445	93.5% N = 445
Total	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476

Table 7 shows the respondents' extent of engagement with social media messages of Coca-Cola. The data indicate that they generally failed to share or comment on the press release, announcement or any other form of message from the company – with just 3.4% and 2.3% respectively saying they shared and commented about once. None of such comments, however, drew any comment or like from Coca-Cola, while other users commented on and liked such comments only a few times (3.2%) and about once (0.4%) respectively. The implication of the foregoing is that these social media pages were not adequately interactively. The organisation did not respond to people's comments. It appears that once the admin made any post, he/she instantly disappeared from the scene only to reappear when another post was to be made. Also, individual users did not seem to be disposed to responding to each other, all because of the non-conversational structuring of the pages by the respective admins. They were equally not too willing to share messages. Such non-disposition towards message sharing would have contributed to the low exposure as reported earlier given that users' willingness to share a social message is the most important factor in the extent of reach such message achieves (Taylor & Kent, 2010).

Table 8
Respondents' Engagement with Nestlé Social Media Messages

Response	Have you ever shared such news, press release, announcement or any other form of Coca-Cola messages	Have you ever commented on such post?	Did your comment draw reply, “like” or any other form of reaction from Coca-Cola	Did your comment draw reply, “like” or any other form of reaction from other social media users?
Several times	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0
A few times	0% N = 0	7.8% N = 37	0% N = 0	3.4% N = 16
Maybe once	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	2.9% N = 14
Never	34.5% N = 164	22.8% N = 142	29.4% N = 37	1.5% N = 7
No Answer	65.5% N = 312	70.2% N = 334	92.2% N = 439	92.2% N = 439
Total	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476	100% N = 476

Table 8 shows the respondents’ extent of engagement with social media messages of Nestlé. The data indicate that they generally failed to share or comment on the press release, announcement or any other form of message from the company – with just 7.8% saying they commented a few times. None of such comments, however, drew any comment or like from Nestlé, while other users commented on and liked such comments only a few times (3.4%) and about once (2.9%) respectively. As stated earlier in respect to Coca-Cola, the implication of this is that these social media pages of Nestlé were not adequately interactive. The respective admins of the pages were not on hand to respond to users’ comments while users were as well not generally willing to react to fellow users’ comments.

Based on the foregoing, the second research question is answered by stating that in using social media for PR, Coca-Cola and Nestlé adopted strategies that involved projecting their images. However, the organisations’ use of social media for PR appeared limited to mere message dissemination and excluded use for research which is one important leverage offered to public relations practice by social media.

Research Question 3: What is the extent of audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé?

Tables 9 and 10 below provide answer to research question as follows:

Table 9
Respondents’ Exposure to Coca-Cola Social Media Messages

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	144	30.3%
No	286	60.1%
No Answer	46	9.7%
Total	476	100%

Table 9 shows that 30% of the respondents were exposed to social media messages of Coca-Cola as against 60.1% that were not exposed to them. The implication of this is that only a minority had encountered such messages, meaning that the company may have failed to reach a good proportion of social media audience

with its messages. Granted that memory could have played a role in the answers given by the response, it is still the fact that people are less likely to forget a message if exposure had been reasonably regular (Potter, 2012). In other words, there is the likelihood that the respondents had been exposed to Coca-Cola social media messages, but that the regularity of the exposure had been too inadequate to aid memory. In any case, such a situation is a pointer to the fact that the organisation's social presence might have been weak and below par.

Table 10
Respondents' Exposure to Nestlé Social Media Messages

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	203	42.6%
No	188	39.5%
No Answer	85	17.9%
Total	476	100%

Table 10 shows the respondents' exposure to Nestlé social media messages. Data indicate that 42.6% were exposed to the messages as against 39.5% that were not. The implication was that not up to majority were exposed to these messages. Nonetheless, there was higher exposure for Nestlé's messages than there was for Coca-Cola messages (see Table 9). As stated earlier in regard to Coca-Cola, the report of non-exposure to Nestlé messages by majority of the respondents could be a function of inadequacy in the regularity at which the organisation disseminates messages on social media, which might have affected the ability of audience to remember such exposure.

Consequent on the above, it is stated, in answer to the third research question, that audience exposure to social media-based PR communication of Coca-Cola and Nestlé was significantly low and that regularity of exposure was also low among those that were exposed to the messages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Given the findings of this study, it is concluded that the social media-based public relations of Coca-Cola and Nestlé failed to satisfactorily leverage the advantages offered by social media, particularly in terms of continuous engagement and interactivity. In effect, the two organisations had adopted social media but are yet to adopt the culture (values and strategies) that goes with it. They were, to some extent, using social media (new media) but still within the compass of the values and strategies of old media where one merely sends out message *to* audience rather than engage *with* audience; talk *to* audience rather than talk *with* it.

Hence, considered within the context of the imperative of the two-way symmetrical communication envisaged by the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations (Achor *et al.*, 2015; Kent & Taylor), the two organisations still have some gaps to fill towards optimising the gains of use of social media for public relations. Their current use culture suffers, not from technological deficiency, but from strategic limitations.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward by the researchers:

1. Coca-Cola Nigeria and Nestlé Nigeria should strengthen their social media public relations through maintenance of stronger social media presence especially by regular minute-by-minute update of their content to reflect the continuity associated with social media communication.
2. The two organisations should adopt strategies to make their social media pages more interactive, conversational and engaging. Their respective admins should maintain uninterrupted presence to ensure prompt response to users' comments and application of other measures to provoke conversations. The organisations should equally appraise the content they put out with a view to improving their appeal to audience.

3. Coca-Cola and Nestlé should expand their PR use of social media to go beyond mere message dissemination to include other uses such as research. This is an important step towards more optimal leveraging of the PR affordances of social media in order to improve competitiveness in the contemporary market.

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