

**APPLICATION OF NEW MEDIA STRATEGIES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: A STUDY OF
UNIVERSITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE**

FRANKLIN O. ONWUBIKO

&

**IFEOMA V. DUNU
NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA.**

ABSTRACT

The field of public relations practice is being redefined by advent of new media as practitioners in various sectors employ varying new media tools to enhance the effectiveness of their PR communication. Against this backdrop, this study dwelt on the application of new media strategies in public relations practice in selected universities in Anambra state, Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed method approach comprising Key Informant Interviews (KII) and survey. The KII involved the public relations officers of the three universities studied, namely Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbaram and Paul University Awka. The survey aspect of the study involved distribution of a structured questionnaire to 370 respondents selected from the staff and students of the universities under study. Findings showed that the universities adopted new media for PR, and that the platforms they employed included Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, e-mail and institution's websites among others. The PR messages of the universities came in the form of university news, press releases/announcements, calls for publications, and information about academic programmes. It was also found that strategies adopted by the PR units of these universities included tracking/monitoring, distribution, communication/content optimization, engagement and measurement. However, the institutions' use of new media for PR appeared limited to mere information dissemination and excluded use for research which is one key benefit offered to public relations practice by the new media. Findings showed further that audience exposure to new media-based PR communication of these universities was significantly high; however, audience did not consider the new media-based PR communications of the universities mutual and interactive. It was recommended that PR practitioners in the university system should explore more available new media platforms and adopt strategies to make their social media pages more interactive, conversational and engaging.

Keywords: New media, New media strategies, Public relations, Nigerian universities

INTRODUCTION

The use of the new media has now become widespread among public relations practitioners and comprises an important strategy in the public relations (PR) sphere (Godswill & Ndifon, 2020). However, the rate of diffusion and application differs, suggesting that the use and application of new media strategy in PR practice may still be a challenge, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. Scholars have observed that while many public relations practitioners value the new media, a few of them actually maximize the advantage it offers to their profession (Godswill & Ndifon, 2020; Gordon, 2010).

PR practice in Nigeria is primarily prevalent in government institutions, parastatals, agencies, and private organizations. Universities are one of such institutions where public relations is widely practised. The practice of public relations here falls in line with the traditional structure of most government institutions, which scholars like Lee, Neeley and Stewar (2012) contend that it often suppresses the specialized nature of PR practice globally. A number of researchers (Key 2005; Waddel, 2010) agree that the role of public relations in the digital age requires understanding how your audiences gather and share information and then influence them at key points. The generality of universities in Nigeria are now facing the need for global visibility, and the appropriate use of the new media. Inya (2017) asserts that:

In the university system, there is high level of compliance to the social media by staff and students. Many of them depend on the social media for information on activities within and outside the university. They use the social media to share their thoughts, make inquiries, and react to posts shared by other members of the university community... the growing popularity and global acceptance of university ranking system, public relations practitioners in the discharge of their duties also become high players in the quest of projecting their institution to higher positions in the ranking system. Contemporary public relations practice in the university requires that the PR practitioner should use social media to complement research efforts of his faculties in order to improve the global rankings of his institution (p.46).

It is pertinent to note that “the new media essentially differ from the old (traditional) media due to their interactive nature and afford users the rare opportunity of becoming both content creators and content consumers or what is now popularly referred to as “Prosumers” (Ukwueze & Obi, 2015). At the same time, feedback, unlike in the old (traditional) media, is immediate in the new media (Okoye, 2011 cited in Ukwueze & Obi, 2015). These special features of the new media become reflected in public relations as noted by Phillips and Brabham (2012) as cited in Ukwueze and Obi (2015):

“New media technologies challenge much of what we know about public relations theory and practice, since these technologies fundamentally change the ways publics interact with organisations, particularly the speed with which that interaction happens. New media technologies, such as the Internet, enable a great deal of temporal flexibility and can facilitate real-time communication (e.g., chat, instant messaging, tweets), rapid message exchange (e.g., email), or indefinite asynchronous communication (e.g., bulletin board systems and blogs, where users can read and leave messages for one another across long stretches of time). New media technologies also have an enormous reach, as messages on the Internet are globally accessible to those with connectivity” (p.148-157).

With the traditional setting of universities in Nigeria, the study interrogated the practice of PR in these institutions. The thesis of this work is that while there are new trends, the extent of knowledge and adoption by PR practitioners in universities in Anambra is still unclear. Based on the foregoing, the researcher investigated:

1. The new media used for public relations practice in the selected universities.
2. The new media strategies used for public relations practice in the selected universities.
3. The extent to which public relations practitioners adopt the new media strategy for public relations practice in the selected universities.
4. How staff and students of the selected universities respond to their institutions’ new media PR messages.

Literature:

Educational Public Relations

Public Relations is one of the most difficult concepts to define (Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019). This is as a result of the fact that it seems so easy to understand how difficult it is to describe it in practical terms (Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019). “Also, several people including Public Relations Department believe they have the best understanding of the concept and so have come up with different definitions of the concept. In fact, experts have also said that there are more than 600 recorded definitions of public relations in existence. This is especially so when we add to the list, the other recorded and unrecorded definitions of what could be described as commonsensical or nonsensical definitions of the concept” (Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019).

Among such objectionable definitions or descriptions are those that present public relations in different words as cover-up, and the public relations' department as those hired to tell lies for their organisations (Black, 1989 as cited in Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019). Black (1989) as cited in Iringe-Koko & Wagbara (2019) in reacting to the distortions in conceptualising public relations, seems to have emphasized truth and full information in his own definition of public relations (Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019). As he states it, "Public relations practice is the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and information." This definition emphasizes truth and information as essential ingredients of public relations; though it is silent and does not bring out the management orientation of modern public relations practice, as well as the current emphasis on the practice of effective organisation at or management performance, research planning and communication as the key to success in modern public relations management (Iringe-Koko & Wagbara, 2019).

Wherry (1982) as cited in Chukwu, Akpor and Wilfred (2021) believes that "No exact records indicate when public relations began in the educational sector, but what exists are historical developments' accounts of educational public relations, which scholars argue began a few years after Bernays first coined the term "public relations counsel" in his 1923 book, titled *Crystallizing Public Opinion*.

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) as cited in Chukwu et al. (2021) defines educational public relations as a planned and methodical management function that aids in the improvement of an educational organization's programmes and services. It is defined as a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programs and services of an education system (especially tertiary institutions of learning) (Ofuani, Sulaimon, & Adebisi, 2018; Okwelle & Agwi, 2018).

According to the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) as cited in Chukwu et al. (2021), educational public relations is based on a comprehensive two-way communication process involving both internal and external publics, with the goal of stimulating a better understanding of the organization's role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs. Aside from the foregoing, educational public relations programmes aid in the interpretation of public attitudes, the identification and shaping of policies and procedures in the public interest, and the continuation of involvement and information activities that win public understanding and support (Chukwu et al., 2021).

Similarly, public relations aids in the development of international academic collaborations, which are essential for nearly every institution these days, by providing global exposure to institutions and fostering academic collaborations with foreign universities through exchange programmes, international accreditation/degrees, and research partnerships (Business Standard, 2020). Given the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the value of public relations to educational institutions and the education industry cannot be overstated (Chukwu et al., 2021).

New Media:

According to Nwanne (2016), "The expression 'new media' is no doubt a buzzword on account of its widespread usage. In fact, it is socially and academically dignifying to be associated with new media." Different terms such as "social media," new media," "online media," "web media," "digital media," "alternative media," and "ICTs" have been used by researchers to describe the new technologies that complement and complicate the process of information gathering and dissemination (Auwal, 2016). Auwal (2015) writes that, "these terms are used interchangeably to describe the new technologies in the communication industry. They are used to describe the digital and computerized communication technologies." Like other concepts in mass communication, the new media has no straight-jacketed definition (Auwal, 2016). Nwabueze (2009) as cited in Auwal (2016) affirms that, "it is still difficult to accurately state what comprises the new media. What exists is an attempt by various scholars to provide a working definition of what could be categorized as the new media." Auwal (2015) defines new media as the "digital and computerized communication technologies such as blogs, podcasts, social networks, wikis, micro-blogs and message boards that can be used by the general public for interaction across distances." The

author adds that “new media are products of globalization and scientific innovations which stem from the expansion of information and communication technologies.”

Nwabueze (2009) as cited in Auwal (2016) sees new media as products of the on-going information technology revolution which have separated the old communication technologies, basically those used prior to the advent of computer (land-line telephone, electronic news gathering camera, analogue radio and television, video text, wireless intercom system, etcetera) from the new communication technologies (computer, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS), digital radio and television systems, the Internet and World Wide Web, GSM phones, and so on). McQuail (2007) cited in Nwanne (2016), described new media as “disparate form of communication technologies that share certain features apart from being new, made possible by digitalization and being widely available for personal use as communication devices”. Essentially, the term new media suggests the opportunities of improved communication (Nwanne, 2016).

New Media Strategy:

This refers to how an organization track and monitor the information that are important to its target and potential audience, how it distributes and communicates the information to them, how it engages them and measure the success of its public relations activities in the new media (Breakenridge, 2012). For her, “when companies (organisations/institutions) use new media strategically in the communication planning process, with greater audience intelligence and market insights, they are better prepared to handle a dynamic and socially engaged public to achieve their intended communication goals” (Breakenridge, 2016).

According to Breakenridge (2012), there are five types of new media strategies and they are:

1. Tracking/monitoring strategy: This is the act of finding out topics and information which a target public considers important and using them to develop PR messages intended for their consumption.
2. Distribution/channel strategy: This is the act of adopting a new media platform which a target public often uses, to put out PR messages for their maximum consumption.
3. Communication/content optimization strategy: This is the act of developing PR messages in ways that they will be well understood by a target public and make the desired impact on them.
4. Engagement strategy: This is the act of chatting with members of a target public in a way that will make them learn about an institution and positively promote it on and off a new media platform.
5. Measurement strategy: This is the act of adopting goal-driven metrics for tracking the success of PR activities on a new media platform.

New media is the dominant force in professional communications today, impacting strategies in everything from marketing to publishing and to public relations (Godswill & Ndifon, 2020). For PR professionals and communicators in particular, a strong and carefully planned new media strategy is vital in order to ensure maximum reach for a client or campaign (Godswill & Ndifon, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research work was anchored on the technological determinism theory and the dialogic theory. The technological determinism theory was propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1962 (Edegoh, Anunike & Nwagbara, 2015) while “the term “technological determinism” is believed to have been coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), an American social scientist” (Muhammad, 2018). Technological determinism seeks to show technical developments, media, or technology as a whole, as the key mover in history and social change (Godswill & Ndifon, 2020). Since technological determinism theory sees technology as the basis for all human activity, it makes it appropriate for the explanation of this study. This is because the practice of public relations by public relations practitioners in the new media, the exposure and reaction of staff and students of the universities selected for the study to such new media contents which are expected to be consumed by them, are part of “human activity” which are largely determined by their use of the new media (technology).

On the other hand, the dialogic theory of public relations as developed by Kent and Taylor (1998) posits that the Internet offers an opportunity for organizations to build true discourse between themselves and their publics (Ekwenchi & Okoyeocha, 2022). 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 (Ekwenchi & Okoyeocha, 2022). Dialogic theory argues that organizations should be willing to interact with publics in a sincere and ethical manner to bring about effective organization-publics communication channels (Wang, 2015 cited in Ekwenchi & Okoyeocha, 2022). And since dialogue and dialogic communication can take place in the new media, it also makes this theory apt for this study.

The public relations practitioners in Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) and Paul University, do engage in dialogue as the theory describes and would probably like to always be better understood by the staff and students of the universities. But for this to happen, they need the skills mentioned by Kent & Taylor (2002) and the training mentioned by Kent (2017) to effectively use dialogue and better understand the staff and students (publics) of the three institutions at all times. This must be why the “theory argues that organizations (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Paul University inclusive) should be willing to interact with publics (staff and students of the universities inclusive) in a sincere and ethical manner so as to bring about effective organisation-publics communication channels.” And since dialogue and dialogic communication can take place in the new media, it also makes this theory apt for this study.

Empirical Reviews

A study by Oche and Sambe (2022) focused on “An assessment of public relations practices in university libraries in Benue state.” The aim of the study was to assess the extent to which university libraries in Benue State build and sustain good relationship with users. The study adopted descriptive research design and was conducted in two government-owned university libraries in Makurdi, Benue State. The researchers sampled 51 respondents from whom data were collected using a questionnaire. Findings showed that, to an appreciable extent, the university libraries under study used orientation/instruction to create good relationship with users. The university libraries also produces publicity campaign for users through institution signage (layout) and persuade funders/stakeholders to provide library resources for the user community through lobbying decision makers of the library to accept and implement library budget proposals. The study concluded that public relations is important for libraries so as to project their good image and retain public trust. The researchers recommended that the libraries under study should also think of creating good relationship with users through their websites as it is a modernized way of relating with users.

In view of the knowledge-gap on the frequency of usage of social media as a digital public relations tool by the Nigerian national and sub-national governments and the levels of e-participation by the online audience, Matyek, Yakubu, Ohaji and Etumnu (2022) carried out “An investigation of social media as a government digital public relations tool: The Nigerian experience.” The study adopted the qualitative approach, with descriptive research as the research design. Findings indicated that all national and sub-national governments use a minimum of two and a maximum of six social media accounts. Nevertheless, it was found out that the frequency of use ranged from monthly to yearly usage among all the 38 governments in Nigeria and the e-participation levels by the online audience are low. The study recommended that efforts should be made for all governments to adopt at least the top four social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram) as digital public relations tools.

To find the “factors influencing use of social media among public relations practitioners in Lagos state”, Saadudeen, Olohunbebe, Ibraheem and Okoji (2021), purposively selected and interviewed eight members of the Public Relations Consultants Association of Nigeria (PRCAN) using email and physical contact formats and analysed the data they collected from the exercise using thematic form of analysis. From this study, they found that the respondents they studied, use social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn among others to promote their clients by establishing and maintaining effective

engagements with their clients' publics. They equally found gratifications such as instantaneous feedback, monitoring, wide reach and constant engagement, as the factors that influence their use of social media and recommended that public relations practitioners should always avail themselves with information and technology capable of enhancing their engagements with different publics.

In a study "Appraisal of the use of social media as tools for public relations practice in tertiary institutions. A study of Federal University of Technology, Minna and Niger State College of Education, Minna", Ende, Shekwaga, Ugboaja and Okonkwo (2020) adopted the survey method selecting a sample of 397. Data was collected using a questionnaire. Findings showed that the Federal University of Technology, Minna has adopted various social media tools for communication between the institution and its publics more than Niger State College of Education, Minna. It was also found that both the Federal University of Technology, Minna and Niger State College of Education, Minna mostly used Facebook to communicate with their publics. The study thus recommended the need for public relations practitioners to be well trained on the use of various social media tools for the purpose of information dissemination between their organizations and target audience/publics.

In his study titled "An Analysis of the Public Relations Approaches of OAU and UNILAG" Umor (2020) investigate use of public relations by Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Lagos for establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between them and their publics in the light of the issue of sex-for-grade affecting the image of higher institutions in the country. Adopting the Excellence Theory and the Systems Theory, the study involved a qualitative analysis of the press releases from the universities and an in-depth interview of the public relations heads of both institutions. Results showed that the universities have been both reactive and proactive in the PR efforts aimed at confronting sex-for-grade scandals. The institutions were found to have largely issued press releases that informed the publics that the authorities have zero tolerance for the unwholesome practice. The study recommended that heads of public relations units be made part of management of the universities and have the units grown into departments where all the activities required of the public relations practice can be made units so they will have expression and ensure the image and reputation of the tertiary institutions.

Inya (2017) evaluated "Influence of social media on public relations practices in universities in south-east, Nigeria." The study employed the qualitative research design to study eight (8) PR practitioners purposively selected from eight (8) universities in the zone (FUTO, UNN, UNIZIK, EBSU, ABSU, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Ebonyi State Federal University, Ndufu Alike and Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike, Enugu State). Data were collected from the respondents using in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face and via telephone. Results revealed that the practitioners used social media in their practice, but that this was largely restricted to Facebook and Twitter. It was also found that social media was replacing the traditional methods of information dissemination to both the internal and external publics including use of notice boards and distribution of hardcopy press releases to media houses. The study, however, discovered that practitioners' frequency of social media use was not adequate to generate backlinks needed to improve the global ranking of their universities.

Study by Asemah (2015) focused on "Investigation of the use of social media for public relations practice in Plateau State." The study was anchored on the Media Equation Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The survey research design was adopted while a questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. Findings showed that the PR practitioners make use of social media and that, to a high extent, the respondents have access to social networking sites. Further, the findings showed that the PR practitioners in Plateau State mostly use Twitter and Facebook for public relations activities. These practitioners use social media for government relations, media relations, communication of corporate social responsibility activities, customer relations, branding, and creating visibility with partners and investors. Results, however, show that the extent to which public relations practitioners in Plateau State use social media for the communication of the activities of their organisations is very low. The study concluded that public relations practitioners in Plateau State have not given due attention to the use of social media for public practice. It was recommended

that PR practitioners begin to do more towards integrating new media technologies in their everyday activities.

In summary, concepts that are relevant to this study were conceptually defined. The researcher adopted the technological determinism theory and the dialogic theory to serve the purpose of helping the researcher to make sense of the current study. The empirical study showed that most public relations practitioners are already adopting the new media in their PR practice although the rate of adoption and exploration of most of these new media platforms and strategies are quite on average.

Research Method

The researcher adopted the survey and the Key Informant Interview research designs. The study area was Anambra State of Nigeria. The state hosts six universities – two public and four private; they are Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (federal), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam (state), Madonna University, Okija (private), Paul University, Awka (private), Tansian University, Umunya (private), and Legacy University, Okija (private), (NUC, 2021). For the purpose of the study, the researcher focused on Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Federal), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (State) and Paul University (private). Below are the population of the academic and non-academic staff and students of the three universities.

Table 1: Sampling Frame (Students)

S/N	Institution	Population	Sample
1.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University	34, 650	210
2.	Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu State University	16, 700	101
3.	Paul University	180	2
TOTAL		51,530	313

Source: Registries of the institutions reflected (2021)

Table 2: Sampling Frame for University Staff

Institution	Staff	Sample
1. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	7490	45
2. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam	1846	11
3. Paul University, Awka	80	1
Total	9416	57

Source: Registries of the institutions reflected (2021)

That, to ascertain the proportion of the questionnaire that will be distributed to the undergraduates of the universities and members of staff, this formula will be used;

$$N = \frac{C \times S}{N}$$

Where n = number to be selected from a category

C = population of a category

S = sample size

N = sum of the populations of the two categories

The sample size for the survey was decided by referring to the sample sizes for various population ranges as worked out by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The sample sizes are as seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3:
Populations and Sample Sizes at 5% Error Margin, 95% Confidence Level

Population Size	Sample
100	80
500	217
1, 000	278
10, 000	370
100, 000	383
500, 000	384
1 million and above	384

Therefore, since the study population is 60, 946 (i.e. up to 10, 000 but less than 100, 000), the researcher will settle for 370 as the sample size. Thus, the sample size of 370 is adopted at 5% error margin and 95% percent confidence level.

The sampling technique used in selecting these samples is the multi-stage sampling technique. At the first stage, two faculties are randomly selected from each of the three universities under study and are as follows:

Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Engineering & Arts), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (Social Sciences & Education), Paul University (Environmental & Social and Management Sciences). The faculties of each University are listed in alphabetical order and then a table of random numbers is employed for choosing two per University.

At the second stage, two departments are randomly selected from each faculty as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Faculty of Engineering (Civil Engineering & Mechanical Engineering). Nnamdi Azikiwe University Faculty of Arts (Religion & Linguistics). Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Faculty of Social Sciences (Political Science & Psychology), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Faculty of Education (Science Education & Education Management), Paul University Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences (Microbiology & Biochemistry) and Paul University Faculty of Social & Management Sciences (Economics & Business Administration).

At the third stage, the researcher randomly selected a predetermined number of respondents from each of the departments mentioned above. The number selected from each department is based on the number of samples allotted to each university as determined using the following formula to ensure proportionality:

$$R = \frac{I \times S}{N}$$

Where R = number of respondents allotted to an institution
 I = student population of the institution
 N = total population of the three institutions sampled
 S = sample size

Table 4
Demographic Data

VARIABLES	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Male	196	56%
	Female	154	44%
	Total	350	100%
Age Bracket	17-27 years	133	38%
	28-38 years	95	27%
	39 years and above	122	35%
	Total	350	100%
Marital Status	Single	210	60%
	Married	123	35.1%
	Separated	1	0.2%
	Divorced	7	2%
	Widowed	9	2.7%
	Total	350	100%
Occupation	Student	293	83.7%
	Academic staff	24	6.9%
	Non-Academic staff	33	9.4%
	Total	350	100%

Table 4 shows that while 56% of the respondents were male, 44% were female. In terms of age, 38% were 17 – 27 years, 27% were 28 – 38 years, 37% were 39 years and above. For marital status, 60% were single, 35.1% were married, 0.2% were separated, 7% were divorced, while 2.7% were widowed. For occupation, 83.7% were students, 6.9% were academic staff while 9.4% were non-academic staff.

For In-Depth Interview Data, three respondents were interviewed for this study. They were Mrs. Chika Ene, Ag. Head, Information and Public Relations Unit, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Dr. Harrison Madubueze, Public Relations Officer, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam and Mr Ikechukwu Abana, Public Relations Officer, Paul University, Awka. The three informants are heads of the departments that handled, among others, public relations programmes of their respective organisations.

Results

1. The new media used for public relations practice in the selected universities.

Ene said: Here, we have plethora of new media platforms we utilize for optimum communication and PR delivery. These include our website, Facebook, WhatsApp, Email, Twitter, Telegram, YouTube and Instagram. Madubeze on his part, noted: We have several platforms we use to engage with our staff, students and publics. These include majorly WhatsApp, telegram, university-based email, Facebook, website and linked. Abana listed website, WhatsApp, email, and Facebook as new media platforms they utilize for PR practice. In summary, WhatsApp, university-based emails, facebook, university websites, twitter are the major new media platforms the university PROs use often for PR practice.

2. The new media strategies used for public relations practice in the selected universities.

Ene stated: To get a desired impact, a combination of two or three of the strategies by Breakeirigde suffices. Here, we consciously, constantly and strategically combine these strategies: communication/content optimization strategy, distribution/channel strategy and engagement strategy. In crafting PR messages, one has to be meticulous in optimizing contents for clarity in communication; secondly your channel of communication must be clearly chosen to reach the desired audience and then again, one must engage his publics for communication to be complete.

On his part, Madubeze noted: Of course, to get the desired impact in doing PR, one must combine various strategies. To a very large extent, we engage al the Breakeirridge’s strategies meticulously and equally apply

them most if not all the time, to achieve the desired result. Our PR communications are strategically and significantly tailored. We equally track and engage our publics.

Abana said on his part: “We factor in distribution/channel strategy, communication/content optimization and most importantly as a growing institution, the engagement strategy to quite a very great extent to achieve the desired goals. For maximum result, strategic efforts must be sustained greatly”.

Summarily, the PR practitioners in the institutions studied apply the new media strategies of tracking/monitoring strategy, distribution/channel strategy, communication/content optimization strategy, engagement strategy and measurement strategy” in doing PR.

3. The extent to which public relations practitioners adopt the new media strategy for public relations practice in the selected universities.

Ene revealed that since her assumption of office in 2019, she paid less attention to traditional media strategies for public relations and embraced wholly the new media and its strategies. “Since 2019, we’ve been conscientious about our new media strategies and followed same to the letter”. We had communicated planned policies and strategies for our new media platforms to the management and haven seen the success from our little efforts, they have continued to approve our requests for upgrade in terms of facilities. We have made communication through university-based emails sacrosanct. We track the reach of our well optimized contents distributed across our new media platforms, engage and monitor reactions and feedbacks of our audience.

Madubeze on his part maintained that the University management had given them full backing on the full adoption of new media and attendant strategies for PR. “We have subtly enforced the dissemination of information through e-channels. We really have grown full blown on the new media and its strategies. The feedback is satisfactory. The traffic on our WhatsApp and telegraph channels are a testament to the success of our usage of the new media”.

Abana maintained that his institution has been quite supportive on the adoption of new media strategies considering the varying competition out there and to become globally acclaimed. In his words, “We do not leave any stone unturned as a budding institution of learning. We employ all know PR strategies to the letter and we are seeing results gradually. Our staff and students appreciate our efforts through our feedback mechanism.

One can deduce from the information disclosed by the interviewees that the extent of adoption of new media strategies is very high.

4. How staff and students of the selected universities respond to their institutions’ new media PR messages.

Respondents’ response to universities’ PR communication in the new media was measured. Questions were asked on their reaction to the messages by way of reading PR communications, belief in these PR communications, how informative the information are and whether it improved understanding of the university workings. Data generated in this regard are as presented below.

Table 5
Respondents' Engagement with University's PR communications in the new media (students)

Response	Do you read news, press release, announcement or listen to or watch any other form of university message from your institution's PR unit in the new media?	Do you believe news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message of interest to you?	Do such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message keep you informed of developments and issues of interest in the University?	Have such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message improved your understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects you as a student?
To a large extent	68% N = 199	71% N = 208	58.2% N = 171	55% N = 161
To some extent	28% N = 82	26.7% N = 78	39.3% N = 115	32.6% N = 96
To a little extent	4% N = 12	2.3% N = 7	2.5% N = 7	10.2% N = 30
Never	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	2.2% N = 6
Total	100% N = 293	100% N = 293	100% N = 293	100% N = 293

Table 5 shows the respondents' extent of engagement with new media communications of universities' PR units. The data indicate that 68% of the respondents read universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 28% said they read to some extent while 12% reads to a little extent.

71% of the respondents said they believe universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 26.7% said they believe to some extent, while 7% believes to a little extent. In the same vein, 58.2% the respondents said universities' PR communications in the new media keep them informed of developments and issues of interest in the university to a large extent, while 39.3% said they it keeps them informed to some extent, the 2.5% said they do so to a little extent.

On the other hand, 55% of the respondents indicated that universities' PR communications in the new media improved their understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects them as students to a large extent; 32.6% said it improved their understanding to some extent, 10.2% said to a little extent while 2.2% said it never did. The implication of these is that the new media strategy(ies) these PROs are adopting in their respective institutions are really getting the intended engagement.

Table 6
Respondents' Engagement with University's PR communications in the new media (Academic staff)

Response	Do you read news, press release, announcement or listen to or watch any other form of university message from your institution's PR unit in the new media?	Do you believe news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message of interest to you?	Do such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message keep you informed of developments and issues of interest in the University?	Have such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message improved your understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects you as a student?
To a large extent	75% N = 18	67% N = 16	83% N = 20	87.5% N = 21
To some extent	17% N = 4	25% N = 6	39.3% N = 17	12.5% N = 3
To a little extent	8% N = 2	8% N = 2	2.5% N = 0	0% N = 0
Never	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0
Total	100% N = 24	100% N = 24	100% N = 24	100% N = 24

Table 6 shows the respondents' (academic staff) extent of engagement with new media communications of universities' PR units. The data shows that 75% of the respondents read universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 17% said they read to some extent while 8% reads to a little extent.

67% of the respondents said they believe universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 25% said they believe to some extent, while 8% believes to a little extent. In the same vein, 83% the respondents said universities' PR communications in the new media keep them informed of developments and issues of interest in the university to a large extent, while 39.3% said they it keeps them informed to some extent, the 2.5% said they do so to a little extent.

On the other hand, 87.5% of the respondents indicated that universities' PR communications in the new media improved their understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects them as academic staff to a large extent while 12.5% said it improved their understanding to some extent. The implication of these is that the new media strategy(ies) these PROs are adopting in their respective institutions are really getting the intended engagement.

Table 7
Respondents' Engagement with University's PR communications in the new media
(Non-Academic staff)

Response	Do you read news, press release, announcement or listen to or watch any other form of university message from your institution's PR unit in the new media?	Do you believe news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message of interest to you?	Do such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message keep you informed of developments and issues of interest in the University?	Have such news, press release, announcement or any other form of university message improved your understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects you as a student?
To a large extent	78.8% N = 26	71% N = 21	66.7% N = 22	69.7% N = 23
To some extent	12.1% N = 4	26.7% N = 7	30.3% N = 10	21.2% N = 7
To a little extent	9.1% N = 3	2.3% N = 5	3% N = 1	9.1% N = 3
Never	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0	0% N = 0
Total	100% N = 33	100% N = 33	100% N = 33	100% N = 33

Table 7 shows the respondents' (non-academic staff) extent of engagement with new media communications of universities' PR units. The data shows that 78.8% of the respondents read universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 12.1% said they read to some extent while 9.1% read to a little extent.

71% of the respondents said they believe universities' PR communications in the new media to a large extent, 26.7% said they believe to some extent, while 2.3% believes to a little extent. In the same vein, 66.7% the respondents said universities' PR communications in the new media keep them informed of developments and issues of interest in the university to a large extent, while 30.3% said they it keeps them informed to some extent, the 3% said they do so to a little extent.

On the other hand, 69.7% of the respondents indicated that universities' PR communications in the new media improved their understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects them as academic staff to a large extent, 21.2% said it improved their understanding to some extent while 9.1% said it did to a little extent. The implication of these is that the new media strategy(ies) these PROs are adopting in their respective institutions are really getting the intended engagement.

In summary, data here indicate that the respondents actually got great value from PR communications in the new media by universities PR units. Tables 5-7 showed how respondents responded to these PR communications. The data here show that a greater majority of the respondents (staff and students) have either read, believed PR communications, kept informed of developments and issues of interest in the university and helped them understand the workings of the university especially as it affects them to a large extent.

Discussion

The study focused on ascertaining Application of New Media Strategies in Public Relations Practice in Selected Universities in Anambra state, new media utilized, strategies adopted extent of adoption and public's response to PR communications. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were read together, and the finding of the study emerged.

There is a high level of internet access and access to internet enabled devices among the respondents (100%). This access to internet enabled device led the staff and students to have access to their universities' new media platforms from which they access information from the PR units. Qualitative findings is in agreement with this qualitative findings, for instance majority of the interviewees agreed that their PR units have adopted and are using new media in their PR practice through such new media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Email, Instagram, and school website. In relation to this findings, extant literature has also agreed that new media has been adopted and is highly used in PR practice. For instance, the study of Oneya (2010) found that that the impact of new media had generally been high and had affected all areas of the practice. Other studies like that of Macnamara (2011) also found that the respondents admitted to their organizations using new network in ways that exploits their interactive two-way communication capabilities and realize best practices. More so, Inya (2017) in his study also found that all the respondents agreed that they use the new media for their professional practices with majority of them limited to the Facebook and Twitter. The implication of this finding and supporting existing literature is that organization and public relations practitioners are already adopting the use of new media for PR practice wholly. Thus, the theory of technological determinism which agrees that human are evolving with technology holds true here.

The evidence of the widespread adoption of new media in the public relations practice in universities, in a technological deterministic sense, affirms that technology as argued by McQuail (2010) can shape our communication culture. This is to say that once a new technology emerges, it tends to redefine our communication culture, setting new standards and imposing new ethos. Thus, everyone is summoned to adopt the new trend. This compelling effect of technology helps explain why the universities studied have adopted new media as integral part of their PR practice.

From this study, the researcher found that Facebook, WhatsApp, email, school website, Telegram, Instagram are the new media platforms PR practitioners in UNIZIK, COOU and Paul University utilize for public relations practice. Based on this finding, it could be said that the practitioners are not among "a good number of public relations practitioners" who Gordon (2010) cited in Orji-Egwu, Oyeleke & Nwakpu (2019) stated that they "are yet to understand how social (new) media can help improve their professional practices." This is because the use of the new media by the public relations practitioners in the universities studied, is an indication that they understand the imperative of its use to improve professional practice.

It was equally found that the new media strategies the PR officers in UNIZIK, COOU and Paul University utilize for their practice include tracking/monitoring, distribution/channel, communication/content optimization, engagement and measurement. This is probably because the three practitioners working for the selected universities are aware that "when companies (organisations/institutions) use social (new) media strategically in the communication planning process, with greater audience intelligence and market insights, they are better prepared to handle a dynamic and socially engaged public to achieve their intended communication goals" (Breakenridge, 2016). The awareness is evident in the regular use of the new media strategies by the public relations practitioners. They use the strategies regularly because they want to achieve their intended communication goals which cannot be achieved if the strategies are applied regularly.

The researcher further found that the new media PR communications of PR officers in UNIZIK, COOU and Paul University keep the staff and students of the three institutions informed of developments and issues of interest in the school, improved understanding of the workings of the university especially as it affects them to a large extent. This must be why "it is said that the communication process is incomplete until there is

feedback; which tells the sender of a message the extent to which his message was understood; and possibly, its impact on the receiver” (Agbanu, 2013). If there are no new media strategies that give birth to communication, there will be no communication. And when there is no communication, there will be no response (feedback) to enable the PR officers function optimally.

So many challenges were found to bedevil the use of new media for public relations practice. Qualitative data cited internet connectivity, high cost of data data, poor internet facilities which pose a major challenge to subtle resistance to new technology which can be an issue with the older generation in the institutions and even conservative attitude towards new technology. However, the study of Oneya (2010) also identified some challenges of the new media that included the need for internet security and much pressure to respond to queries, allegations and instant feedback to divergent and fragmented publics that may not be easily profiled at same time. Another challenging finding was the existing knowledge gap among practitioners especially on how new media could be best tapped into.

Conclusion

This changes in human existence with the arrival of the new media is what is experienced in the Public Relations practice of the society as the new media with its distinct features has somewhat aided the day to day practice of public relation in universities.

In the universities, the public relations units has taken to the affordances of new media through the ownership of Facebook pages, WhatsApp platforms, Instagram accounts and websites for disseminating information and press releases. Despite the adoption of the new media, and its feedback mechanism which has made it somehow preferred, engagement is still an issue as most respondents said these platforms were fairly engaging.

Thus, there is no gainsaying that the technological determinism perspective is in full force while the arguments of the Dialogic Public Relations theory is quite relevant in today’s PR practice as the practitioner now rely on the leeway created by the features of the new media to efficiently carry out their functions. Thus, the use of new media in PR practice is changing the face of practice although findings from the study still maintain that there are many drawbacks which the practitioners themselves and university management must find a solution to before new media in PR practice will be optimum and possibly traditional media will then give way for new media to hold sway.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that;

1. Public Relations practitioners in the University system should explore more available new media platforms to maximize the potentials they offer. Their counterparts globally adopt plethora of new media platforms to advance and project the image of their institutions, endearing them to prospective candidates world-wide. They should not restrict themselves to the common ones while there is avalanche of others.
2. PR practitioners should strengthen their new media public relations through maintenance of stronger social media presence especially by regular minute-by-minute update of their contents reflecting the continuity associated with new media communication.
3. The practitioners should engineer creativity in making in making their social media pages more interactive, conversational and engaging. There should be dedicated personnel saddled with the responsibility of responding swiftly and professionally to users’ comments and application of other measures to provoke conversations. Contents should be optimized to garner the much-needed traction.
4. PR practitioners should expand their PR use of new 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.

5. University Management should make concerted efforts towards solving the myriad of challenges facing full functionality of their public relations units. They should be adequately funded and important facilities provided for optimal productivity.
6. Staff of PR units of universities should be sponsored for ICT/New Media training programmes to boost performance.

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