



USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AMONG PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICERS IN SELECT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the use of digital communication technologies among public relations officers in select Federal Government organisations in Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The total population of the study was three hundred and fifty-six (356) public relations officers. Results indicate that Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, official websites are some of the digital communication technologies that are utilised by the public relations officers. The results were further strengthened with digital media theory which is a conceptualisation of the digital reality of users that contribute to their overall lives. The study concludes that the extent to which digital communication technologies are used among public relations officers in their various units facilitates effective information management, creates awareness for the services rendered by the organisations and lots more. Among other things, it was recommended that, the Federal Government should launch their official websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, share to different platforms as to create awareness about the activities of the organisations to ensure adequate patronage.

Keywords: Digital Technology, Communication, Public Relations, Nigeria



Introduction

The media landscape has transformed significantly, shifting from traditional forms like books and newspapers to a dynamic digital ecosystem, driven by advancements in chip technology in the 1950s and the internet's origins in the 1960s via ARPANET (Kente, 2022). This digital revolution has reshaped public relations (PR), enabling global connectivity and innovative communication strategies. In Nigeria's Federal Government organisations, PR professionals utilise digital tools such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and intranets to engage diverse audiences, moving away from traditional media campaigns focused on television, radio, and print (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms facilitate real-time dialogue, opinion monitoring, and data collection, with 69% of businesses recognising digital transformation as vital for growth, leveraging technologies like AI, VR, and APIs to enhance brand-audience connections (Tench & Waddington, 2024).

Digital communication has globalised PR, allowing professionals to access varied media content and manage stakeholder relationships worldwide. Tools like TweetDeck and Hootsuite streamline information management, enabling effective content curation (Kente, 2022). However, the digital divide beyond mere access to include effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) poses challenges. In Nigeria, limited technological proficiency exacerbates this divide, leading to misunderstandings and misuse of digital platforms (Wei & Hindman, 2011). Additionally, misinformation and disinformation, often termed "fake news," threaten organisational credibility, particularly for government institutions. Misinformation, such as conspiracy theories, and deliberate disinformation amplify risks in a volatile social media landscape (Jahng et al, 2020). Nigeria's infrastructural limitations further hinder digital adoption, yet PR practices align with global trends (Kente, 2022).

Despite these challenges, digitalisation offers significant opportunities for PR, including global reach and real-time interaction (Tandoc et al, 2018). PR professionals must navigate ethical dilemmas, misinformation, and the digital divide while maintaining credibility (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). This study explores how digital tools reshape PR practices, focusing on information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and perception management. It

underscores the dual nature of digital media as a tool for progress and a source of complexity, highlighting the critical role of PR practitioners in balancing opportunities and risks to drive organisational success in a digitally interconnected world.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid adoption of Digital Communication Technologies (DCTs) like Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp has revolutionised public relations (PR) in Nigeria's Federal Government Organisations, enabling swift information dissemination and stakeholder engagement. However, significant challenges undermine their effectiveness. The digital divide, exacerbated by inadequate funding, restricts PR officers (PROs) from accessing essential digital tools, reducing efficiency and forcing publics to rely on unverified sources, damaging organisational reputation (Lindgren, 2017). Urban-rural disparities, marked by poor network coverage, poverty, and illiteracy, further limit equitable access to DCTs, hindering credible communication. Misuse of DCTs by PROs, such as prioritising personal social media over official duties, lowers productivity and organisational returns. Additionally, weak gatekeeping mechanisms fuel cybercrime, including hacking and fraud, eroding public trust through deceptive practices like fake promotions. This study examines DCTs' impact on PR operations, assessing financial, ethical, and operational challenges, and proposes solutions to enhance effectiveness and mitigate risks like misinformation, fraud, and the digital divide.

Research Questions

The specific research questions are:

1. What are the types of digital communication technology utilised by public relations unit in your organisation?
2. To what extent is digital communication technologies used in public relation unit in your organisation?
3. What is the effectiveness of digital communication technologies activities of your organisation?

4. What are the challenges of the use of digital communication technologies among public relations practitioners in your organisation?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Two-Way Communication Model, developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in *Managing Public Relations* (1984), as part of their Four Models of Public Relations, which classify communication by direction and purpose (Tench & Waddington 2024). The model includes the Two-Way Asymmetrical and Symmetrical Models. The Asymmetrical Model focuses on persuasive communication, where organisations use feedback, such as social media analytics, to craft targeted messages for government initiatives without altering policies, aligning with Grunig's strategic principles (Grunig & White, 2022). Conversely, the Symmetrical Model, rooted in systems theory, promotes mutual understanding through dialogue, fostering trust and collaboration. For example, federal agencies might use Twitter to engage citizens in policy discussions, incorporating feedback to refine initiatives (Kim & Ni, 2023). This model emphasises negotiation and adaptability, requiring honest, open communication to accommodate publics (Asemah et al, 2021). In Nigeria, public relations officers (PROs) leverage digital communication technologies (DCTs) for both models, but challenges like the digital divide, inadequate funding, and cybercrime hinder effective application, limiting interactive communication. This framework highlights opportunities for enhanced engagement and barriers to efficiency and credibility in federal organisations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Digital Technology: The concept of digital technology emerged over seven decades ago, rooted in mathematical principles proposed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and advanced by American researchers (Autio et al, 2018). Digitalisation is defined as the socio-technical process of applying digitising techniques to social and institutional contexts, making digital technologies infrastructural (Tilson et al, 2010, cited in Autio et al, 2018). Lister et al

(2009, cited in Siapera, 2018) identify four key features: media convergence (e.g., reading books or watching films online), data compression into compact formats (e.g., USBs, cloud storage), rapid and non-linear data access, and data manipulation (e.g., data mining, photoshopping). Plowman and McPake (2013) describe digital technologies as devices (e.g., computers, smartphones) and outputs (e.g., DVDs, websites, games) created or accessed on these devices. Autio et al (2018) extend this to include software, sensors, and infrastructures like cloud-based services, highlighting their role in enabling fast, accessible, and manipulable data systems.

Public Relations: Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication process used by organisations, individuals, and companies to foster mutually beneficial relationships with publics (Verna, 2020). PR specialists craft communication plans, leveraging media to build positive brand images and strong audience connections. Historically, PR traces back to figures like Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, relying on press releases in its early forms. Today, it has evolved to incorporate social media and digital platforms to keep pace with societal changes, maintaining its core elements of information, persuasion, and trust-building (Verna, 2020). Moore and Kalupa (cited in Verna, 2020) outline PR's four elements: a social management philosophy, policy decisions reflecting this philosophy, actions stemming from these policies, and two-way communication shaping them. This study analyses modern PR trends, examining how digital technologies enhance engagement while navigating challenges like the digital divide and misinformation in Nigeria's Federal Government Organisations.

Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical studies offer valuable insights into digital communication technologies (DCTs) in public relations (PR), particularly for Nigerian Federal Government Organisations. Matysek et al (2022) explored social media as a PR tool in Nigerian governments, finding all 38 entities used two to six accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), but with inconsistent updates and low e-participation. They recommended strategic, frequent use of platforms like

Facebook. The current study aligns in examining digital PR but focuses on broader DCTs and uses two-way communication theory, unlike Matyek's social construction approach.

Matyek's 2017 study surveyed 106 mobile Internet users in Plateau State, revealing low appreciation for government digital platforms due to reliance on traditional media. It contrasts with the current study's focus on 356 PR officers and broader DCTs, using descriptive methods and two-way symmetric theory, offering complementary perspectives on public perceptions and PR practices.

Gberevbie et al (2016) assessed e-governance in Nigeria, noting poor website usability and limited interactivity, recommending improved design and training. The current study, while also descriptive, focuses on PR officers' DCT adoption, differing in scope (PR vs. e-governance) and theoretical frameworks (PR vs. ICT adoption).

Graham and Avery (2018) studied U.S. local government PR, finding 70% used social media but faced training and policy challenges. Both studies use surveys and dialogic communication theory but differ in context (U.S. local vs. Nigerian federal). Macnamara (2020) found PR practitioners globally relied on one-way communication, recommending two-way dialogue and training. Unlike the current study's focus on Nigerian federal PR and technological determinism, Macnamara used mixed methods and evaluation theories.

Eyrich et al (2021) noted global PR practitioners adopted six social media tools but underutilised two-way communication, advocating training. The current study, focusing on Nigerian PR officers, shares survey-based methods but examines a broader DCT range. Achor et al (2023) found Facebook dominant in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with training and infrastructure limiting strategic use. This aligns with the current study's focus on digital PR challenges, though it targets educational rather than federal contexts.

Research Methodology



This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to quantify factors like readiness for legal action and campaign approval, ensuring consistency and comparability through standardised questionnaires. The population comprises 356 public relations officers from selected Federal Government Organisations in Nigeria. Using a coherence sampling technique, the sample size is 356, with 335 questionnaires returned and usable, yielding an 87% response rate. The research instrument is a questionnaire, supplemented by focus group discussions (FGDs), designed to gather data from PR officers. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree=5 to strongly disagree=1) to measure respondents' agreement. Data were collected via direct solicitation, face-to-face conversations, and phone interviews from PR officers across various organisations, including 50 from the Public Complaints Commission (PCC) Maitama, 65 from Federal Medical Centre Keffi, 60 from Nigerian Immigration Service Abuja, and others, totalling 356 participants from multiple federal agencies in Abuja, Nasarawa, Benue, and Niger States.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Respondent distribution of demographic information by gender, educational qualification, years of experience and designation respectively.

S/N	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	200	56%
2	Female	156	44%
	Total	335	100
3	OND/NCE	140	39%
4	Bsc/HND	150	42.1%
5	MSc	50	14.0%
6	PhD	16	4.5%
	Total	335	34.2%
7	1-5 years	122	45%
8	6-10 years	160	14.0%
9	11-15 years	50	6.7%
10	16 and above	24	100%
	Total	335	38.2%
11	Information Officer	136	35.9%
12	Information Officer 1	128	8.7%
13	Senior Information Officer	31	8.1%
14	Assistant Chief Information Officer	29	3.9%
15	Chief Information Officer	14	2.5%
16	Assistant Director Information	9	2.2%
17	Deputy Director	8	0.2%
18	Director Information	1	100%
	Total	335	

The study surveyed 356 public relations officers, with males comprising 56% (200). Most hold OND/NCE qualifications (39%, 140), have 6-10 years' experience (45%, 160), and 38% (136) are Information Officers.

Research Question One (R1):

RQ 2: What are the types of digital communication technologies utilised by public relations unit in your organisation?

Keys: 0 = not available, 1=available

Keys: PCC=Public Complaint Commission, NUC= National Universities Commission, FMCK= Federal Medical Centre Keffi, SCDC= Security and Defence Corps, BSU= Benue State University, RBM= Radio Benue Markudi, NIS= Nigeria Immigration Service, and FRSC= Federal Road Safety Corps.

Table 2: Digital Communication Technologies Utilised by Respondents

S/N	Types of digital communication technologies utilised by public relations officers	PCC	NUC	FMCK	SCDC	BSU	RBM	NIS	FRSC	Total
1.	Twitter	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
2.	Facebook	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
3.	Instagram	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
4.	YouTube	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
5.	LinkedIn	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
6.	Official blogs and websites	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	335
7.	Others: specify	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		335
Total		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6

Table 2 indicates that each of the 8 institutions surveyed makes use of at least one digital communications technology by the Public Relations Officers (PROs) in the select federal government organisations in Nigeria.

Table 3: The Extent digital communication technologies is used by the respondents

S/N	Statement	SA	S	N	D	SD	N	FX	X	StD	Decision
1	Facilitate effective management	155	150	20	13	18	335	1479	4.15	1.03	Agree
2	Creates awareness for service rendered by the organization	150	140	30	25	11	335	1461	4.11	1.02	Agree
3	Improves job performance	160	150	20	20	6	335	1506	4.23	0.91	Agree
4	Increase patronage by various publics	155	152	25	17	7	335	1499	4.21	1.48	Agree
5	Enhance federal government satisfaction	155	150	20	18	13	335	1484	4.17	1.00	Agree
6	Provides speedy information delivery	156	155	20	18	7	335	1503	4.22	0.91	Agree
7	Helps the federal government manage its public/reputation	160	155	20	15	6	335	1516	4.26	0.87	Agree
8	Provide a conducive environment to both the information officers and their publics	160	155	20	16	5	335	1517	4.27	0.86	Agree

The above indicates that respondents view digital communication technologies as highly beneficial for public relations officers (PROs) across several aspects of their work, given that each item exceeds the benchmark mean of 2.0 on the five-point Likert scale.

Table 4: Effectiveness of digital communication technologies activities of the respondents

S/N	Effectiveness of digital communication technologies activities	SA	A	N	D	SD	N	FX	X	StD	Decision
1	It improves job Performance	170	150	18	15	3	335	1537	4.32	0.82	Agree
2	It improves professional practice	170	140	28	14	4	335	1526	4.29	0.86	Agree
3	The use of social media accounts as digital PR tools gives citizens opportunity for e-Participation	170	140	27	14	5	335	1524	4.28	0.87	Agree
4	Digital media is incorporated in the day-to-day operations of PR practice	130	150	50	20	6	335	1446	4.06	0.92	Agree
5	Public relations practitioners easily adopt to digital media in your organisation	125	130	50	26	25	335	1372	3.85	1.14	Agree
6	Staff of the PR department are trained about digital media	130	130	30	50	16	335	1376	3.87	1.18	Agree
7	PR Officers use digital media to monitor the flow of events in the Organization	170	120	30	20	16	335	1476	4.15	1.08	Agree

Table 4 indicates a generally positive perception of digital communication technologies in public relations (PR) as reflected by the high mean scores across various items.

Table 5: Challenges of digital communication technologies by respondents

S/N	Challenges of digital communication technologies by P.R.O	SA	A	N	D	SD	N	FX	X	StD	Decision

1.	Information overload	170	140	20	18	8	335	1514	4.25	1.00	Agree
2.	Fake information on the Net	170	140	30	13	3	335	1529	4.29	0.84	Agree
3.	Lack of basic skills by users in handling digital technologies	170	140	25	17	4	335	1523	4.28	0.87	Agree
4.	Lack of passion for digital technologies	160	140	25	25	16	335	1501	4.10	1.08	Agree
5.	Lack of expertise	170	120	40	20	6	335	1496	4.21	2.24	Agree
6.	Preference for traditional Media	150	140	30	25	11	335	1496	4.21	2.24	Agree
7.	Inability to access digital technologies by users due to cost Constraint	160	130	30	25	11	335	1471	4.13	1.04	Agree
8.	Inability to access digital technologies due to poor/inadequate power supply.	160	150	25	10	11	335	1506	4.23	0.93	Agree

Table 5 Shows that what negatively impacts the likelihood of successful implementation and utilisation of digital technologies for communication is predominantly Secondly, is Fake Information on the Internet.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the types of digital communication technologies utilised by public relations unit in your organisation?

The study found that public relations units in Nigerian Federal Government Organisations utilise digital communication technologies, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and official websites. This aligns with the federal civil service's goal of full digitalisation by 2025, as stated by Mrs Folashade Yemi-Esan, Head of Civil Service (Nation Newspaper, 2023). Digital platforms enhance brand building through shared video content, parodies, and memes, serving as paratextual techniques (Hackley & Hackley, 2018, cited in [page 544](#))

O'Connor, 2023). Networked publics, described as bottom-up and top-down online communities, exemplify this, with Twitter enabling political actors and civic projects to engage audiences (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013, cited in O'Connor, 2023). Similarly, Matyek et al (2022) found Nigerian governments use two to six social media accounts for PR. The adoption of digital media by PR officers is a positive step, urging all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to transition from traditional to digital media by 2025 to remain competitive.

Research Question 2: To what extent is digital communication technologies use in public relations unit in your organisation?

The study's findings from research question two highlight the critical role of digital communication technologies (DCTs) for public relations officers in Nigerian Federal Government Organisations. DCTs enhance information management, job performance, public patronage, government satisfaction, and reputation management while enabling swift information delivery and fostering conducive environments for officers and publics. Orji-Egwu's (2019) study in Ebonyi State supports this, showing digital media enables global collaboration and networking, enhancing PR efforts. The federal government leverages DCTs to redefine communication and engage citizens in political structures. Necmiye and Fahri (2017, cited in Orji-Egwu et al, 2019) note digitalisation transforms customer behaviour, business practices, and organisational service delivery. Additionally, Social Media Engagement Theory (Theory Hub, 2020-2024) explains user interaction through likes, comments, and shares, fostering social presence, community, and trust. While offering significant benefits, social media engagement has negative aspects, necessitating optimised use to maximise positive impacts and minimise drawbacks in PR practices.

Research Question 3: what is the effectiveness of digital communication technologies activities in your organisation?

Analysis of Table 4 reveals that digital communication technologies (DCTs) significantly enhance the effectiveness of public relations officers in Nigerian Federal Government Organisations. DCTs improve job performance and professional practice, enable e-participation through social media, and are integrated into daily PR operations. PR practitioners readily adopt digital media, receive training, and use it to monitor organisational events. These findings align with Matyek et al (2022), who investigated social media as a PR tool in Nigerian national and subnational governments, noting a global shift to digital PR. Their study found varied usage frequency (monthly to yearly) across 36 governments, with low e-participation. Kente (2022) supports this, highlighting ICT's influence on PR knowledge and timely, credible communication. The federal government should ensure DCTs are fully integrated into PR practices, with training to enhance adoption and event monitoring, aligning with technological determinism theory to optimise professional duties and public engagement.

Research Question 4: What are the challenges of the use of digital communication technologies among public relations practitioners in your organisation?

Table 5 highlights challenges faced by public relations officers in Nigerian Federal Government Organisations using digital communication technologies (DCTs), including information overload, fake news, inadequate skills, lack of passion or expertise, preference for traditional media, and access barriers due to cost and poor power supply. The shift from email blasts and press releases to user-generated content and social media has transformed PR, with niche markets and influencers driving consumer behaviour, making it harder to predict (Ogbu, 2019). Social media's lack of gatekeeping fuels misinformation and hate speech, complicating PR efforts. Customer feedback and word-of-mouth now outweigh traditional advertising, as publics construct realities from direct or shared brand experiences, posing significant challenges for PR practitioners.

Conclusion

The study concludes that public relations officers in Nigerian Federal Government organisations effectively use digital communication technologies like Twitter, Facebook, and websites to enhance information management, job performance, stakeholder engagement, and public satisfaction. These tools improve professional practices and enable e-participation. However, challenges including information overload, misinformation, limited skills, preference for traditional media, high costs, and poor power supply impede adoption. Addressing these barriers is crucial for optimising digital PR by 2025.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the Nigerian Federal Government:

- 1) Launch official websites and social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn) to boost awareness and patronage.
- 2) Offer incentives to encourage PR officers' passion for digital communication technologies.
- 3) Monitor PR officers to ensure proper use of digital tools for official purposes, enhancing reputation management.
- 4) Provide up-to-date technologies and training for PR officers to develop professional skills, ensuring effective and professional use of digital platforms.

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