

Comparative Analysis of Social Media Use in Public Relations in Two Selected Public Universities in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This comparative study examines social media adoption in public relations practice between Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU) and Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE). In-depth interviews were conducted with eight purposively selected public relations practitioners (four from each institution). Data analysis employed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Three primary themes emerged: institutional digital readiness disparity, strategic platform utilization versus conservative adoption, and security-communication efficacy tension. Findings reveal contrasting approaches to social media integration. DELSU demonstrates comprehensive digital embrace with systematic multi-platform strategies, managing over 50 WhatsApp groups and employing Facebook, Instagram, and X for stakeholder engagement. Conversely, FUPRE exhibits institutional resistance driven by security concerns, maintaining preference for traditional communication methods and limited social media usage. The study concludes that successful social media adoption requires institutional cultural shift, leadership support, and strategic risk management. DELSU's proactive approach contrasts sharply with FUPRE's conservative stance, highlighting the critical role of institutional readiness in technology acceptance.

Keywords: Social Media, Public Relations, Technology Acceptance Model, Digital Communication.

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to overstate the importance of public relations in developing and sustaining a strong relationship between a company and its publics. The goal of public relations techniques is to construct a two-way communication process that looks for shared interests and builds genuine understanding. Public relations support communication and cooperation between a company and its publics. One of the essential elements for the operation and effectiveness of any organization is public relations (Kapenda, 2022). Whether an organization succeeds or fails largely depends on how effective its public relations efforts are.

Public relations is a type of communication that focuses on using persuasive language to influence people's behavior and actions in order to benefit an organization as much as possible (Adelabu and Kazeem, 2021). "Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organization and the public interest" (World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, 1978). The International Public Relations Association (IPRA, 2019) sees public relations as a "decision making management making practice tasked with the building relationships and interest between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods". Strategic communication is the foundation of public

relations, according to The Saylor Foundation (2016).

Today, every organization, regardless of size, is probably aware of the value of creating lasting relationships with its publics. In order to develop, maintain, and ideally improve the bottom line in their operations, organizations must by necessity collaborate with a variety of groups and types of people usually referred to as "publics" (Nwanne, 2016). Public relations is a type of communication that is designed to build and maintain public acceptance and understanding of an organization. It involves crisis and problem management, which helps organization executives understand the public's opinions and create policies that consider the interests of the general public (Chepkemai, 2021). Building and managing relationships is key to public relations (Nwanne, 2015).

This is done deliberately. It has awareness. It is scheduled. The goal of public relations is to assist organizations in creating and maintaining the range of relationships necessary for their long-term success (Amadi and Umor, 2020). Public relations, according to Amadi and Umor (2020), also encourages a tranquil workplace environment, increased output, corporate discipline, and persuades individuals of an institution's credibility, visibility, performance, potential, and the calibre of its goods and services.

According to Igben (2022), one key role of public relations in higher education is to strategically foster an understanding between the institution and

its various publics that benefits both parties. He added that despite the presumption that all individuals associated with higher education institutions serve as its representatives and are, therefore, merely incidental public relations agents, particularly those in positions of authority, management, and supervision, public relations professionals are officially charged with the primary responsibility of co-ordinating the public relations activities in order to achieve positive, holistic and corporate relationships with the targeted publics.

Statement of problem

Traditional public relations instruments, including press conferences, press releases, exhibitions, facility visits, feature articles, mass media, organizational publications, fact sheets, and special events, dominated PR communication for extended periods (Sodeinde, 2019). The emergence of contemporary communication technologies has significantly transformed public relations implementation, precipitating fundamental changes in communication patterns and profoundly impacting methodologies, operational environments, and stakeholder interaction modalities.

Social media platforms have become critical communication channels for public relations professionals, particularly within higher education institutions. Contemporary practitioners must develop comprehensive multi-channel strategies to address diverse public needs as the roles of public relations officers and social media significance continue evolving alongside technological advancement and globalization (Samwel and Lando, 2021). Social media platforms increasingly dominate the public relations landscape, with their effectiveness in audience identification and engagement enabling practitioners to achieve desired outcomes (Odimabo and Wagbara, 2018).

The integration of new media and social media platforms in public relations practice has generated considerable enthusiasm for contemporary initiatives, particularly within higher education institutions, while improving media exposure, funding acquisition, and stakeholder engagement (Hanson, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee and Schlegel, 2011). A critical question emerges regarding whether public relations practitioners in higher education institutions have successfully adopted, utilized, and benefited from these advantageous characteristics of new media approaches.

However, practitioners exhibit divergent approaches to social media adoption. While some professionals successfully leverage social media opportunities to advance their professional practices and enhance organizational global reputation, others disregard social media as serious platforms for advancing public relations objectives, utilizing them primarily for personal communication and consequently leaving their organizational publics vulnerable to online misinformation and rumor propagation.

Despite extensive global research on social media's transformative impact on public relations practice, limited empirical evidence exists regarding adoption patterns, utilization strategies, and effectiveness among Nigerian higher education practitioners. The literature particularly lacks comparative analysis between different university types and contextual understanding of practical challenges and success factors within Nigeria's educational sector.

This study investigates social media influence on public relations practice at Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU) and Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE), determining whether these practitioners represent those whose professional practices have been effectively transformed by social media integration.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this work are to:

- establish the level of awareness of social media use by the institutions' public relations officers in their daily PR communication in DELSU and FUPRE
- ascertain if public relations officers use social media for internal and / or external PR communication in DELSU and FUPRE
- find out the social media platforms used by the public relations officers and the most used platform in DELSU and FUPRE in communicating with their publics

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that will guide this study are:

- What is the level of awareness of social media use by the institutions public relations officers in their daily PR communication in DELSU and FUPRE?
- Do public relations officers use social media for internal and / or external PR communication in DELSU and FUPRE?

- What are the social media platforms used by the public relations officers and the most used amongst them in DELSU and FUPRE in communicating with their publics?

Delimitation of the study.

This study limits itself to two public universities (one federal university (FUPRE) and one state university (DELSU)). The study also restricts itself to the FUPRE and DELSU PR practitioners' offices. The study focuses on the social media channels that public relations professionals use to communicate with their internal and external publics on a daily basis. Because of their level of engagement by social media users and user-friendliness, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were the four social media platforms that Practitioners frequently used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Level of Awareness of Social Media in Public Relations Activities by PR Practitioners

Contemporary public relations practice has undergone substantial transformation as practitioners increasingly integrate social media platforms into traditional communication strategies while maintaining their fundamental responsibility of building relationships with internal and external constituencies. Traditional public relations methodologies, including press conferences, press releases, exhibitions, facility visits, feature stories, media engagement, organizational publications, fact sheets, and special events, continue to serve as foundational elements of professional practice (Sodeinde, 2019). However, the integration of social media platforms into contemporary PR campaigns has created new paradigmatic possibilities for organizational communication and stakeholder engagement.

Social media platforms fundamentally humanize organizational communication by facilitating interpersonal interaction desires inherent in human behavior. Organizations strategically employ these platforms to create more authentic, humanized interactions with their constituencies, thereby increasing the likelihood of bridging social gaps between institutions and their stakeholder communities (Smiths, Blazovich, and Smith, 2015; Kapenda, 2022). Yinusa (2019) articulates how modern technologies enhance and facilitate communicative processes while assisting in more efficient information generation, dissemination, and distribution to highly dispersed global audiences. This technological evolution has substantially broadened media reach, with some

professionals regarding social media emergence as among the most significant developments in contemporary public relations practice.

Despite these transformative possibilities, the impact of new media deployment creates substantial challenges for many public relations professionals. A significant proportion of practitioners appear to lack comprehensive understanding of how social media can advance their professional effectiveness, with some utilizing these platforms merely as additional channels for personal communication rather than strategic organizational tools (Agha, 2017; Salau, Oyesomi and Oyedepo, 2020). Galloway (2005) and Tang and Chan (2016) corroborate this perspective, noting that while social media demonstrate considerable effectiveness in public relations communication, numerous practitioners continue struggling with platform impacts and challenges, thereby hindering comprehensive adoption and strategic implementation.

The introduction of social media has not inherently undermined public relations' fundamental function in managing organizational public perception nor diminished its capacity to execute traditional responsibilities. Rather, these platforms have provided expanded opportunities for public relations to fulfill its essential organizational role. Previously, PR professionals operated within constraints imposed by limited mainstream media channels—television, radio, and print media—dominated by well-funded corporations with restrictive access requirements. Practitioners traditionally faced temporal limitations, requiring either favorable opportunities or increased financial investment to achieve message dissemination objectives. Social media has dramatically altered these operational parameters (Ogbu, 2019), necessitating that contemporary Nigerian PR practitioners develop competencies for managing communicative fluidity within social spaces while engaging target publics increasingly influenced by social relationships and experiential factors rather than traditional asymmetrical press releases.

Social media platforms function as widely utilized tools enabling both individuals and organizations to construct viable, reputable stakeholder relationships while facilitating diverse information sharing to direct and indirect constituencies. Within higher education contexts, Agha (2017) demonstrates that staff and students demonstrate high adherence to institutional social media usage

policies, with many relying on these platforms for information regarding both internal and external institutional events. Stakeholders utilize social media for opinion expression, information seeking, and responsive engagement with institutional community posts, while employing smartphones and laptops to monitor institutional developments through social media access.

This technological shift has created additional responsibilities for university public relations specialists, who must now satisfy informational needs of internal and external publics through their preferred communicative channels. Through strategic management of internal and external communications, public relations assumes increasingly important roles within higher educational institutions, particularly given the growing prominence of university ranking systems that cannot be ignored by contemporary practitioners.

Modern university public relations practice extends beyond traditional internal and external communication advancement to encompass broader institutional positioning within global academic communities. Contemporary practice mandates that public relations professionals utilize social media to support faculty research initiatives, thereby enhancing institutional global standing. Online presence has become a critical metric for international institutional evaluation, with public relations departments at prestigious institutions strategically employing social media platforms to create backlinks to institutional websites. These digital connections constitute fifty percent of Webometric ratings, representing one of the most significant agencies for university ranking determination (Agha, 2017). This evolution demonstrates how social media integration has transformed public relations from traditional communication management to comprehensive digital reputation governance within competitive global higher education markets.

Internal and External Communication

The contemporary higher education landscape has undergone profound transformation precipitated by educational policy liberalization that facilitates commercial engagement, thereby engendering an intensely competitive institutional environment necessitating sophisticated public relations strategies for market positioning and stakeholder engagement. This paradigmatic shift underscores the theoretical foundation established by Sodeinde (2019), who posits that developing systematic

procedures for fostering mutual understanding between institutions and their constituent publics constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for effective public relations praxis. This conceptual framework aligns with the British Institute of Public Relations' canonical definition of public relations as a deliberate, planned, and sustained endeavor to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their diverse stakeholder constituencies.

Higher education institutions have responded to these environmental pressures through the strategic establishment of Public Relations Departments, typically positioned within the organizational hierarchy as adjuncts to either the Vice Chancellor's or Registrar's Office. While maintaining their traditional mandate of information dissemination through circulars and institutional bulletins, these units have evolved to encompass broader strategic functions. Agha (2017) illuminates this evolution, documenting how numerous universities have reconceptualized PR units as catalytic mechanisms for comprehensive marketing initiatives, wherein public relations officers orchestrate fundraising endeavors through strategic media partnerships. Furthermore, institutions increasingly deploy PR managers to ameliorate internal relational dynamics, particularly in response to escalating incidents of student unrest and trade union agitations that threaten institutional stability.

Contemporary higher education public relations practice necessitates a sophisticated understanding of the dialectical relationship between internal and external communication modalities, which function as complementary yet distinct strategic imperatives. Internal communication, conceptualized by Nwanne (2015) as organizational efforts to engage internal constituencies, serves multifaceted functions including reputation building, academic collaboration facilitation, and institutional visibility enhancement. Silva and Silva (2020) argue persuasively that effective communication constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for institutional success and sustainable growth within contemporary educational systems. Despite its strategic importance, internal communication remains systematically undervalued by many organizations, notwithstanding its critical role in facilitating interpersonal connections, information interpretation, and the establishment of organizational culture and values (Nwanne, 2015). Block and Laurinkari (2012) provide theoretical

clarity by defining internal communication as the communicative influence within organizational contexts, encompassing message creation, dissemination, and information flow facilitation among organizational members, while Quirke (2017) reinforces this understanding through emphasis on organizational cohesion mechanisms.

Concurrently, external communication functions as the primary interface between institutions and their external stakeholder networks, including prospective students, parents, strategic partners, funding entities, media organizations, and the broader public sphere. Long (2025) articulates external communication's dual mandate: creating and maintaining positive organizational perceptions among stakeholders while simultaneously constructing relational frameworks that enhance institutional reputation and market positioning. The strategic integration of internal and external communication modalities becomes increasingly critical as institutions navigate the competitive admissions marketplace characterized by unprecedented public enrollment growth and extensive private sector participation, constraining institutional options and necessitating comprehensive strategic responses.

Public relations departments within educational contexts bear responsibility for reputation management across diverse stakeholder groups encompassing both internal and external constituencies (Igben and Ugbome, 2022). These institutional publics comprise a complex ecosystem including students, faculty, staff, community members, parents, guardians, alumni, and other relevant stakeholder categories. The fundamental organizational imperative involves creating communication frameworks that foster harmonious relationships among various subsystems and broader societal contexts. Adelabu and Kazeem (2021) conceptualize public relations as the systematic communication of information to diverse publics or subsystems with the explicit objective of achieving predetermined institutional management objectives.

Social Media Platforms Used in PR Communication

The digital revolution has fundamentally reconstituted public relations practice, with social media platforms emerging as indispensable instruments for direct stakeholder engagement and relationship management. Soemirat and Ardianto (2019) document how internet technologies have enabled practitioners to establish direct

communication channels with target constituencies, effectively circumventing traditional gatekeeping mechanisms embodied by media editors and journalists who historically controlled message dissemination and content censorship. Social media platforms, theoretically conceptualized by Ufuophu-Biri and Iwu (2014) as interactive digital environments facilitating user-generated content creation and dissemination, represent Web 2.0 technological resources that prioritize active user engagement, connectivity, collaborative processes, and knowledge exchange mechanisms. The term "social media" refer to varieties of websites and applications that allow users to post content, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snap Chat, You Tube, and WhatsApp, among others, which are considered to be among the top social media platforms (Huittinen, n.d.; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Islam et al., 2020; Kapenda, 2022).

The Nigerian higher education context provides empirical evidence of social media's transformative impact on institutional communication strategies. With 38.7 million active social media users as of January 2025, Nigeria demonstrates substantial digital engagement potential that higher education institutions can strategically leverage. Platform utilization patterns reveal significant differentiation: WhatsApp dominates with over 95% penetration (36.7 million users), followed by Facebook (28 million users), Instagram (10 million users), and X, formerly Twitter (7.57 million users, following recovery from governmental restrictions imposed between June 2021 and January 2022) (Statista, 2023; Datareport, 2025).

WhatsApp's predominance in internal higher education communication derives from its cost-effectiveness, scalable group messaging capabilities supporting up to 256 participants, and comprehensive multimedia sharing functionalities. Empirical research conducted by Church and de Oliveira (2013) and Quan-Haase and Young (2010) identifies social influence as the primary determinant of WhatsApp adoption, with the platform's communicative affordances enabling informal, conversational interactions that promote sustained engagement patterns. Subsequent investigations by Kariuki (2017) and Chepkemai (2021) corroborate WhatsApp's status as the preferred communication platform among departmental constituencies, faculty members, and student populations, facilitating diverse communication flows including class

representative-student interactions, administration-student dialogues, and instructor-representative exchanges.

Facebook's strategic value in higher education public relations centers on its extensive reach capabilities and community-building affordances. Originally conceived as an academic social networking platform by Mark Zuckerberg and colleagues at Harvard University in 2004, Facebook has evolved to serve over one billion global users while maintaining relevance for educational institutions. Sttesky and Stránská (2015) document Facebook's temporal advantages over traditional communication channels, enabling rapid issue publicization and stakeholder response mechanisms. Despite inherent challenges in addressing heterogeneous stakeholder groups, Komodromos (2014) identifies Facebook as an optimal platform for public relations professionals, citing its diverse posting capabilities, information dissemination velocity, and interactive response requirements.

Instagram has emerged as a critical platform for engaging younger demographic segments, particularly adolescents and young adults attracted to its visual content paradigm and innovative design elements. Palaph (2020) documents the normalization of strategic Instagram utilization by university public relations officers, with the platform's photograph and video sharing capabilities proving especially effective for youth engagement initiatives. Instagram primarily serves external constituencies and has become integral to contemporary university public relations campaigns, offering visual storytelling opportunities that traditional media cannot provide.

X (formerly Twitter) functions as a microblogging platform facilitating brief message dissemination limited to 280 characters, enabling instantaneous reach to extensive audiences through tweet and retweet mechanisms. Established in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone, and subsequently acquired by Elon Musk, X facilitates professional networking, real-time news dissemination, and stakeholder relationship development through hashtag systems that function as content categorization and discovery mechanisms.

The strategic integration of these digital platforms requires sophisticated understanding of their unique communicative affordances and audience

characteristics. Sultan (2014) theorizes that platform selection decisions are influenced by economic considerations and perceived connectivity benefits, with users gravitating toward platforms that facilitate social relationship maintenance and conversational engagement. Yeboah and Ewur (2014) emphasize the transformative impact of mobile communication technologies, particularly WhatsApp, in creating more accessible, efficient, and cost-effective communication channels that transcend traditional geographical and economic barriers.

The increasingly competitive higher education environment necessitates comprehensive resource utilization to establish and maintain positive institutional image and stakeholder relationships (Agha, 2017). Success requires sophisticated communication strategies that integrate traditional and digital channels while recognizing the fundamental importance of creating harmonious relationships among diverse stakeholder groups. As higher education continues its evolutionary trajectory, institutions must develop adaptive communication strategies that leverage social media's direct engagement capabilities while maintaining adherence to foundational public relations principles emphasizing mutual understanding, stakeholder benefit, and sustainable institutional relationships. This integration demands not merely technological adoption but strategic reconceptualization of how higher education institutions construct, maintain, and leverage their communicative relationships with increasingly diverse and digitally sophisticated stakeholder communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In contemporary studies, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a vital theoretical framework for comprehending technology adoption behavior. TAM was created by Davis (1989) as an improvement on the Theory of Reasoned Action, which was first put forward by Fishbein (1967) and Ajzen (1975). It is based on the basic principle that assessments of expected outcomes and perceptions of behavioral results determine an individual's attitudes toward particular behaviors. According to El-Kassim and Idid (2016), TAM's specific focus on describing and forecasting computer usage behavior was made possible by the conceptual foundations of the TRA.

TAM's theoretical relevance arises from its capacity to clarify the reasons behind people's

decisions to embrace or reject particular technologies. The approach is based on the idea that adoption is essential to the effective utilisation of new technologies, especially in modern digital environments (Davis and Bagozzi, 1989). TAM is useful for understanding complicated technology adoption decisions in both personal and professional situations because of its explanatory power.

The two main components of TAM's approach are perceived usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). Consumers' acceptance and usage patterns are greatly influenced by these conceptions, which act as mediating variables. Perceived Ease of Use is the degree to which people think utilising a certain technology would be both mentally and physically easy and it includes evaluations of learning curves, operational complexity and accessibility. While opinions of complexity generate barriers to acceptance, users show a better possibility of adopting technology when they perceive less constraints to its operations.

Perceived Usefulness is the expectations that applying a certain technology will enhance performance or productivity in given circumstances. This dimension includes performance improvements and functional advantages, which are real-world advantages people ascribe to technology. While users who see limited benefit are far more likely to oppose implementation, those who see significant benefits are more inclined to embrace adoption.

Together, these structures offer a thorough knowledge of the choices people make regarding the adoption of technology. According to Igben and Ugbome (2023) and Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh (2021), both frameworks need to be advantageous for the best possible adoption of technology. Because practitioners' decision-making processes closely match TAM's emphasis on perceived usefulness and simplicity of use when evaluating platforms for professional communication goals, TAM is especially well-suited for researching social media use in public relations situations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using in-depth interview to access participants' subjective perspectives, facilitating better understanding of social processes and human motives within their contexts (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Purposive sampling was utilized

to select one federal and one state university, as this technique is appropriate when researchers seek specific traits or insights that only particular individuals possess (Okeke, 2001). Eight participants from two universities were deliberately selected to ensure data adequacy while maintaining methodological rigor. In qualitative research, sample size determination prioritizes data saturation over statistical representativeness (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The selection of one federal and one state university in Delta State provides adequate institutional diversity for comparative analysis. Four participants per institution (coded A1 to A4 for DELSU and B1 to B4 for FUPRE) aligned with established qualitative protocols where smaller, purposively selected samples yield richer insights than larger random samples (Patton, 2015). This configuration enabled intensive data collection through in-depth interviews, facilitating comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences within their institutional contexts. Homogeneous sampling within each Public Relations Department ensured participants possessed relevant expertise essential for addressing the research questions, consistent with phenomenological traditions where 6-12 participants are sufficient for achieving theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2013).

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The analysis began with data familiarization through multiple readings of transcripts and review of audio recordings to capture nuances in tone and emphasis. Initial codes were generated inductively across the dataset, considering both semantic and latent meanings. Codes were then collated into potential themes using visual theme maps to identify relationships and patterns.

The preliminary themes underwent rigorous review to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness, with themes being merged, refined, or discarded as necessary. Final themes were defined with clear scope and boundaries, and sub-themes were identified where appropriate. The analysis concluded with the selection of compelling data extracts that illustrated each theme and related findings back to the research questions and existing literature. This systematic approach ensured analytical rigor while maintaining sensitivity to the complexity of participants' experiences.

Data Presentation and Analysis

At this point, a glimpse of the data is presented.

1. To what extent are DELSU and FUPRE's public relations officers aware of the usage of social media in their everyday PR communications?

Despite the fact that both respondents are aware of the use of social media in public relations, Respondent A1 rated his institution's awareness as very high, stating that "our institution has a very high level of awareness regarding social media usage in PR communications. We understand that social media is not just a trend but a fundamental shift in how we connect with our stakeholders," adding that they have developed comprehensive social media guidelines and their PR team receives regular training on digital communication strategies. Respondent A2 rated their awareness as excellent, explaining that "we've seen firsthand how social media can amplify our reach and create meaningful dialogue with our community" and that their leadership fully supports digital PR initiatives with allocated resources specifically for social media management.

In contrast, Respondent B1 rated it low because, in his opinion, social media should only be used for "social interactions and networking" and should not be used for official institutional communications, explaining that "we prefer traditional methods like official circulars, memos, and bulletin boards. This approach helps us maintain proper documentation and reduces the risk of information breaches." Respondent B2 supported this view, stating that their institution is cautious about social media usage due to security concerns, adding that "we prioritize information security over reach" and use social media sparingly, mainly for general announcements and community events.

Respondent A1, speaking further, said that through engaging their social media platforms by directing traffic to their website, they are able to create a strong online presence that complements traditional communication methods. Respondent A2 added that they track engagement metrics and use analytics to improve their communication effectiveness. Both identified challenges in carrying out their duties related to digital communication management.

This suggests that although one institution has become more open to the possibilities offered by PR practitioners' use of social media in their

practice, the other is still indifferent to it with stated reasons.

2. Do PR professionals at DELSU and FUPRE use social media for internal and/or external PR communication?

Both Respondents agreed that they use social media in communicating with both their Institutions' internal and external publics with Respondent B1 insisting that serious information are not passed through their social media. Respondent A1 explained that "we actively use social media for both internal and external communications. For internal communication, we have established WhatsApp groups for different departments and faculties" which facilitate quick information sharing about meetings, policy updates, and urgent notices. Respondent A2 added that their social media platforms are used strategically with WhatsApp for immediate internal updates, Facebook for community engagement, Instagram for visual storytelling about campus life, and X for news and official statements, ensuring they reach different audience segments effectively.

Respondent B1, on the other hand, insisted that "we do use social media, but with significant restrictions. For internal communication, we rely heavily on official channels like departmental notice boards, email systems, and formal circulars," maintaining that when they do use social media internally, it's mainly for non-sensitive information like staff welfare announcements or social events. Respondent B2 supported this position, stating that "our use is limited and selective. We maintain that serious institutional communication should follow formal protocols," explaining that while they have social media accounts, they're primarily used for community engagement during events, celebrating achievements, and sharing health tips or safety information, because critical communications like academic announcements, policy changes, or administrative matters are handled through their official website and traditional media.

3. What are the social media platforms used by the public relations officer and the most used amongst them in DELSU and FUPRE in communicating with their publics?

Respondent A3 affirms that WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and X are the four major social media platforms adopted for use by the institution. Respondent A4 further stated that Facebook and

WhatsApp are the most used because Facebook's user-friendly interface and robust features for community building make it ideal for engaging alumni, prospective students, and the general public, while WhatsApp's simplicity and reliability make it perfect for internal coordination. Respondent A3 explained that WhatsApp is their most effective tool for internal communication due to its instant messaging capability and high penetration rate among staff and students, while Facebook ranks second because of its versatility in sharing different content types and its broad user base. Responding further, Respondent A4 stated that they have over 50 different WhatsApp groups serving various departments and interest groups within the institution, adding that Instagram and X serve more specialized purposes - Instagram for brand building through visual content and X for thought leadership and news dissemination. Respondent A3 added that Instagram is particularly useful for showcasing campus life and events through visual content, while X helps them stay current with trending topics and engage in academic discourse.

Respondent B3, on the other hand, explained that while the use of social media is a necessity in modern day Institutions, the institution is careful on sharing confidential information via these platforms. He explained further that "we primarily use Facebook, WhatsApp, and occasionally X. However, our usage is quite limited compared to other institutions," stating that Facebook is their main external platform where they share general institutional news, event photos, and community announcements, while WhatsApp is used for some internal coordination, but they're careful about the type of information shared. Respondent B4 further stated that their platform usage is conservative, explaining that "Facebook serves as our primary social media presence for external communication, mainly for sharing non-sensitive information like cultural events, student achievements, and general announcements," adding that WhatsApp is used minimally for internal communication, and only for informal updates. He stated that they've deliberately avoided extensive use of Instagram and X because they believe they're more suited for personal rather than institutional communication, noting that they avoid X for most communications due to its public nature and potential for misinterpretation of institutional messages. However, the institution is said to prefer their official website and email systems for important

communications. They, however, use email to share confidential information.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach, several key themes emerged from the interview data that illuminate the contrasting approaches to social media adoption between DELSU and FUPRE.

Theme 1: Institutional Digital Readiness and Awareness

The analysis reveals a fundamental difference in how both institutions perceive and integrate social media into their PR practices. DELSU demonstrates what can be characterized as "digital embrace," with respondents A1-A4 consistently expressing high confidence in social media's utility for institutional communication. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), where DELSU exhibits high "perceived usefulness" and "perceived ease of use" regarding social media platforms. Respondent A2's statement about tracking "engagement metrics and analytics" demonstrates the institution's systematic approach to measuring social media effectiveness, reflecting Davis's (1989) TAM construct of behavioral intention leading to actual system use.

Conversely, FUPRE's responses (B1-B4) reveal significant resistance rooted in security concerns and institutional conservatism. Through the TAM lens, FUPRE displays low "perceived usefulness" of social media for official communications, with Respondent B1 explicitly stating that social media platforms should primarily serve their intended purpose for "social interactions and networking." This resistance aligns with Galloway's (2005) findings on PR practitioners' struggles with new media adoption, where security concerns and uncertainty about professional boundaries create barriers to technology acceptance.

Theme 2: Platform Strategy and Communication Channels

The thematic analysis identified distinct approaches to platform selection and usage patterns. DELSU's multi-platform strategy (A1, A3, A4) demonstrates what can be termed "strategic diversification," utilizing WhatsApp for internal coordination, Facebook for community engagement, Instagram for visual storytelling, and X for thought leadership. This approach reflects high behavioral intention to use technology, consistent with TAM's prediction that positive

attitudes toward technology lead to increased usage.

FUPRE's limited platform engagement (B3, B4) reveals a "selective minimalism" approach, where platform choice is driven by risk aversion rather than communication effectiveness. The institution's preference for "official website and email systems" over social media reflects low perceived usefulness and high perceived risk, factors that TAM suggests lead to technology avoidance.

Theme 3: Information Security vs. Communication Efficacy

A critical theme emerging from the analysis centers on the tension between information security and communication reach. DELSU's approach suggests a resolution of this tension through strategic information management, while FUPRE views it as an irreconcilable conflict. This dichotomy reflects what Tang and Chan (2016) identified as a persistent challenge in PR practice, where practitioners must balance transparency with confidentiality.

FUPRE's emphasis on being "careful on sharing confidential information" and avoiding platforms due to their "public nature and potential for misinterpretation" (B3, B4) demonstrates high perceived risk, which in TAM terms creates negative attitudes toward technology adoption. This finding supports Galloway's (2005) argument that many PR professionals remain skeptical of new media's impact, viewing traditional methods as more reliable and secure.

The study found that while social media have redefined the practices of public relations in higher public institutions, DELSU has fully embraced the possibilities available in social media usage in its public relations practices. Its awareness level of social media influence in its PR practices is high as it has been able to utilise its application in its PR communication with both its internal and external publics. It has also helped in making the institution globally visible. Supporting this, Yinusa (2019) stated that modern technologies are today enhancing and facilitating the communication process activities, as well as assisting in the generation, dissemination and distribution of information more efficiently to highly dispersed audience in the world more than ever before. The study is also in accordance to the finding of Yeboah and Ewur (2014), who opined that social media use has a greater positive impact on the

practice of public relations in an institution of higher learning.

However, the study also showed that FUPRE is yet to fully adopt social media usage in its public relations communication. Sharing this view, Galloway (2005) and Tang and Chan (2016) stated that as effective as social media is in public relations communication, a lot of PR practitioners are still struggling with the impact and challenges of social media thereby hindering their total adoption. The impact of employing new media is causing severe problems for many public relations professionals. It seems like a lot of public relations professionals still don't fully grasp how social media can advance their careers. While others don't, some of them merely use social media as another means of personal communication (Agha, 2017; Salau, Oyesomi and Oyedepo, 2020).

The study further showed that Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and X are the social media platforms used by DELSU and FUPRE. According to Chepkemai (2021), Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram are the major tools of engaging the internal and external publics. The importance of these tools was echoed by Necmiye and Apaydin (2017) that X, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. have become viable means of reaching the public and building corporate images, thus supporting the motion of Respondent A4 which observed that Facebook and WhatsApp dominate their social media usage with over 50 different WhatsApp groups serving various departments.

The thematic analysis reveals that successful social media adoption in institutional PR requires more than technological capability; it demands institutional cultural shift, leadership support, and strategic risk management. DELSU's success in leveraging social media for global visibility and stakeholder engagement demonstrates TAM's prediction that high perceived usefulness and ease of use lead to successful technology integration. Conversely, FUPRE's conservative approach, while prudent from a security standpoint, may limit its communication effectiveness in an increasingly digital landscape, supporting concerns about incomplete social media adoption in institutional settings.

CONCLUSION

This paper comparatively analysed social media usage in public relations in two selected public universities in Delta State, Nigeria. The public Institutions studied are Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU), and Federal University of Petroleum, Effurun (FUPRE). Through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and Technology Acceptance Model interpretation, the study indicated that while social media had redefined the practices of public relations in DELSU due to its innovativeness and adaptability to social media usage, FUPRE remains tentative in its usage due to perceived security risks and low perceived usefulness of social media for official communications. The study also discovered that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most commonly used platforms because of their user-friendly interface, high penetration rates among stakeholders, and level of engagement by subscribers.

The analysis revealed three critical themes: institutional digital readiness disparities, contrasting platform strategies, and the fundamental tension between information security and communication efficacy. While DELSU demonstrates strategic diversification in platform usage with high behavioral intention toward technology adoption, FUPRE exhibits selective minimalism driven by risk aversion rather than communication effectiveness. These findings align with existing literature on PR practitioners' struggles with new media adoption, particularly Galloway's (2005) observations about security concerns creating barriers to technology acceptance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

1. FUPRE management should carry out a social media awareness campaign to showcase the importance of social media usage in public relations activities and global university visibility and ranking. This should include demonstrating successful case studies from peer institutions and addressing security concerns through proper risk management frameworks.
2. Both institutions' management should employ personnel or train their PR teams on social media use, cybersecurity and effective communication. PR teams should track social media performance to improve engagement and reputation.
3. FUPRE should use social media more for official announcements while following strict security measures to prevent risks. Updating information on the social media platforms of the universities should not depend on the breaking of major news events.
4. Both institutions should mix old and new PR methods to ensure secure and effective communication. This hybrid approach should leverage traditional methods while maximizing social media reach and engagement potential.

Universities should develop comprehensive social media policies that address security concerns while enabling effective communication. Clear guidelines for information classification and platform-specific usage protocols should be established.

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