

# NEW MEDIA AND MEDIA RELATIONS PRACTICE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

New media is a trending innovation, and its impact, when applied by organisations in media relations activities, is a contemporary issue. The impact of new media on every social and non-social ramification is remarkable. This research work is guided by Technological determinism and the Diffusion of Innovation theories; the study adopted the survey method of research with a well-structured questionnaire as a data collection instrument; findings show that both public and private organisations adopt new media technologies operations. The study concludes that new media in media relations cannot be overlooked since public relations practitioners' use of new media tools in public and private organisations is beneficial. It has improved the maintenance of a cordial relationship between organisations and their public through the quick dissemination of information to the journalist and the public. The study recommends that organisations, especially public organisations, encourage the use of new media among their public relations staff.

**Keywords:** New media, influence, media relations, cybercrime, innovation.

**Declaration of conflicting interests:** The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of media relations in organisational communication cannot be overemphasised as it promotes swift dissemination of information between an organisation and its publics. Media relations has been a central part of the public relations practitioner's work. Previously, public relations professionals send press releases by calling up a journalist to pick a story about their client or business. However, due to the use of new media incorporated into organisational duties, a public relations professional could "tweet" a journalist's information or a story the media professional might be interested in or send a press release link through different social media websites.

Media relations aim to maximise positive coverage in the mass media without paying for it directly through advertising. Media relations refer to the relationship between a company and journalists,

while public relations extend that relationship beyond the media to the general public (Jonston 2013). Some of the early descriptions of media relations are still being upheld in today's definition, though the new media which brought about online media have transformed media relations practice. Tench and Yeonmans (2006) noted that media relations involve "managing relationships with the media, all the writers and producers who contribute to control what appears in print, broadcast and online media". According to Biagi (2005), media relations are contacting news media, freelance writers, and trade publications to publish or broadcast news or features about or originated by the organisations.

Media convergence is a phenomenon of new media, and this can be explained as digital media. According to Flew (2002), "The idea of new media captures both the development of unique forms of

digital media and the remaking of more traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to the new media technologies". This accounts for the reliance on computers, smartphones, tablets, and other media instead of the previous analogue means of information gathering. New media has drastically changed communication fundamentally over traditional media, especially in information dissemination. It is imperative to note that many organisations which used newspapers and broadcast news operations to disseminate information now have websites from which they dispense information. Furthermore, using the internet as a platform, email and videoconferencing have also become veritable tools in this new dimension Fitzgerald & Dennis (2005).

Before the evolution of new media, organisations carried out their organisational activities remarkably well. What are more, organisations that wisely practised Public Relations performed their Public Relations activities without using new media and did remarkably well. However, In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new media was introduced into the corporate world, and this redefined what public relations and media relations are all about, forever. New media have been said to have a positive and negative influence on our world today. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the exact influence new media has on media relations practices in public and private organisations in Edo state, Nigeria.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for the study is the Technological Determinism theory and Diffusion of Innovation Theory. The idea was propounded by Marshall McLuhan (1982). This theory revolves around the proposition that technology in any society defines its nature. Technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in an organisation and determines its strength in history. The first significant development of technological determinism theory came from a German philosopher and economist named Karl Marx. Karl Marx argued that changes in technology and specifically productive technology are the primary influence on human social relations; what are more, cultural practices ultimately revolve around the technological base of a given society. Marx's position has become embedded in temporary culture, where the idea that fast-changing technologies alter human lives is all-pervasive. The study stated that media technology shapes how we as individuals think, feel, and act and how an organisation operates as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal- Literate- Print- Electronic). This is to say that: We learn, feel, and

think the way we do because of the messages we receive through the currently available technology. The radio required us only to listen and develop our sense of hearing. Television, on the other hand, now engages both our hearing and visual senses.

Technological determinism seeks to show technical developments, media or technology as a whole as the key mover in history and social change. Claude (1992) characterised the most prominent forms of technological determinism as billiard ball' approaches. Technology is seen as an external force introduced into a social situation producing a series of ricochet effects.

According to Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), technological determinism is "the belief that technologies have an overwhelming power to drive human actions, " leading to social change. From the preceding, it is evident that media relations practitioners in Nigeria must understand that new media technologies, when properly harnessed, can transform media relations practice. By their very nature, new media technologies are drivers of social change, national development, and organisational development. The various media of communication and their gatekeepers in Nigeria, on the other hand, have responsibilities and freedom in their information gathering and dissemination task as posited by development media theorists, by ensuring that organisations operating in Nigeria are objectively and positively presented to the world. This is possible because of technological transformations of new media technologies, which now overlap with some modern tools for media relations and the relationship between the media and organisations in media relations, which must be sustained and maintained mutually.

This theory is suitable for this research work as this research study is majorly focused on the influence of new media technologies on media relations practice. This theory guides this research from a technological perspective which is what the cooperate world has fully adopted in its activities. Finally, it is suitable for this research as it encapsulates a significant theme in this research New Media Technologies. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory is considered relevant to this study. Everett Rogers (1962) developed the theory. It was coined by a 19th-century French legal scholar and sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, titled the 'Laws of Limitation'. Diffusion of innovations theory states that an invention (that is, an idea, new technique, or new technology) diffuses or spreads throughout society in a predictable pattern. A few people will adopt innovation as soon as they hear of it. Other people will take longer

to try something new, and still, others will take much longer.

Diffusion research examines how ideas are spread among a group of people, centring on the conditions that increase or decrease the likelihood that an innovation, a new theory, a product or a practice, will be adopted by members of a given culture. All individuals do not adopt innovations in a social system at the same time. Instead, they tend to adopt in time sequence and can be classified into adopter categories based on how long it takes them to begin using the new idea. Rodgers proposes that four main element influences the spread of a new idea; the innovation itself, communication channels, time and a social system. This process relies heavily on human capital; the invention must be widely adopted to self-sustain. When a new media technology or another innovation is adopted rapidly by a significant number of people, it is said to explode, Bryant & Thompson, (2002). The theory discussed above conforms to the study because new media technologies are beautiful tools corporate PR practitioners use in carrying out their duties, especially in media relations. In order words, this theory guides this research work from an innovative perspective as this research exemplifies the impact of the innovation of 'new media' on media relations practice.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of questionnaires and in-depth interview. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed; 265 copies were returned and found usable for the analysis. Of the 265 returned questionnaires, 258 of the organisations that returned responses indicated they use new media in their practice of media relations (Table 1).

For the interview, four public relations practitioners from different organisations were interviewed.

### 4. FINDINGS

**Table 1:** Organisations' use of new media in media relations practice

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Yes	258	97.4
No	5	1.9
Total	263	99.2
Missing System	2	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As shown in Table 2, 102 (38.5%) of the respondents indicated that they very often use new media whenever they engage in media-related

activities, while 87 (32.8%) of them use new media often. Only 5(1.9%) respondents indicated they never use new media concerning activities (Table 2). In addition, the majority of the respondents, 110 (41.4%), see new media as a significant and relevant innovation in media relations practice. In comparison, 73 (27.5%) indicated that new media is critical in media relations activities. However, 13 (4.9%) of the respondents noted that new media is unnecessary for media practitioners in media-related activities.

**Table 2:** Frequency of use and perception of public relations practitioners in the use of new media in the practice of media relations?

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Frequency of public relations practitioners' use of new media in their practice of media relations</b>		
Very often	102	38.5
Often	87	32.8
Sometimes	59	22.3
Rarely	10	3.8
Never	5	1.9
Total	263	99.2
Missing System	2	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Public Relations practitioners' perception of incorporation of new media into media relations practice</b>		
Very important	110	41.5
Important	73	27.5
Neutral	31	11.7
Necessary	36	13.6
Unnecessary	13	4.9
Total	263	99.2

Generally, 112 (42.3%) of the respondents indicated that New media has been beneficial in the discharge of media-related activities. In comparison, 81 (30.6%) believed that new media has been helpful to public relations practitioners in the discharge of media-related activities. Only 5 (1.9%) of the respondents indicated that new media has not been beneficial in discharging media-related activities. On the role of new media in media relations in the organisation, a higher proportion of the respondents (47.9%) believed that new media plays the role of both quick dissemination of information to the public and rapid dissemination of information to the public media. In comparison, only 2.3% indicated that new media do not perform any of these two roles.

**Table 3:** Usefulness and role of new media in the discharge of media-related activities by public relations practitioners

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
<b>The usefulness of new media for public relations practitioners in the discharge of media -related activities?</b>		
Very Helpful	112	42.3
Helpful	81	30.6
Neutral	36	13.6
Rarely Helpful	29	10.9
Not Helpful	5	1.9
Total	263	99.2
Missing System	2	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Role of new media in the practice of media relations in an organisation</b>		
Quick dissemination of information to the public	83	31.3
Brief dissemination of information to the media	48	18.1
All of the above	127	47.9
None of the above	6	2.3
Total	264	99.6
Missing System	1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>

For challenges with the use of new media by media practitioners, 173 (65.3%) of the respondents indicated that they face challenges as they carry out media-related activities through new media. Among the challenges faced, cybercrime (23.8%), power supply (24.5%) and network failure (21.5%) were the most indicated challenges

**Table 4: Challenges of media practitioners in the use of new media**

Variable	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Do public relations practitioners encounter challenges during the discharge of media relations activities?</b>		
Yes	173	65.3
No	91	34.3
Total	264	99.6
Missing System	1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Challenges encountered by public relations practitioners during discharge of mediarelations activities</b>		
Cybercrime	63	23.8
Power supply	65	24.5
Network failure	57	21.5
Internet illiteracy	40	15.1
Fake news	38	14.3
Total	263	99.2
Missing System	2	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Thematic Analysis of Interview Data Use of New Media**

Concerning the use of new media, one of the respondents, **Interviewee 1** revealed that the

organisation he works for finds new media very helpful in his discharge of duties as they use various new media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to reach their significant clients. According to him, *"The new media as a matter of fact has been helpful to us in the sense that majority of our clients or subscribers are also on these new media platforms, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, we are also on those media and have large followers, So it's helpful to us"*. He claimed that these mediums are very fast in the dissemination of information and uploading of lotto results. **Interviewee 2** also revealed that the organisation finds new media very helpful in carrying out its organisational activities. It has also created awareness for the development of their organisation and has brought a lot of prospective students their way. These two public relations officers above work in a private organisation. However, **Interviewee 3** and **Interviewee 4** both public relations officers of organisations revealed that they prefer the conventional media over new media in media relations. They opined that they like journalists come to their office and get newsletters to avoid distortion of information. *"The Public Relations department of this ministry will surely prefer to have a strict mainstream of news item and know exactly what goes to the public and make sure the public gets the right message at the right time"* **Interviewee 3**. **Interviewee 4** also support this view by saying, *"we post online but we prefer trained journalists to come and personally get the news from us to avoid misinformation"*.

**Cybersecurity Measures**

**Interviewee 1** further revealed that adequate cybersecurity measures are already in place to counter the hacking of the organisation's online activities. He said: *"I will say we don't encounter any cybercrime activity; the reason is that we seriously have inbuilt security software that aids us to counter any cybercrime activity. Most of our technical appliances are run in Nigeria and that creates an advantage for us to detect any cybercrime activity"*.

**Challenges**

The interviewees face limited challenges in the cause of using the new media one of them revealed that some criminals upload fake results on the internet, thereby negating the actual results which affect clients' perception of the Company. *"One or two of the fake news that we hear about is that sometimes-fake results are being dished out in the market and by the time the real result comes out, everybody will say green lotto have posted fake result in the market because of that"*

some people are losing interest, losing trust and not believing in green lotto, that's one of the problems we encounter" **Interviewee 1**. This shows the power of the new media. Any information circulated can affect the organisation positively or negatively. **Interviewee 3** revealed that the misuse of the new media by some evil being made her organisation prefer the mainstream approach in media relations; according to her, people circulate information without adequate verification. According to her, "The challenge posed by the new media is that they tend to give out information that is yet been verified as a correct and private individual come up who are not Public Relations practitioners come out to disseminate information without a professional expertise and at the end of the day, they misinform the public, that's the major challenge we face with new media".

Finally, **Interviewee 2** opines that their organisation faces no challenges as they use new media. He says the organisation has benefited a great deal as their online content has brought the organisation good fortune for the views online has promoted the organisation and has fetched them a good number of prospective students.

### Discussion of Findings

**Research Question One:** *Do public relations practitioners in organisations use new media in their practice of media relations?*

This study investigated if the respondents use new media in their practice of media relations, and the responses derived from table 3 indicate that the majority of Organisations who have Public Relations departments use new media. Table 4 also buttresses the answers in Table 3 as the figures show that most of the respondents use new media often; this indicates they enjoy the service of new media while discharging their duties. The data from the interview shows that Public Relations practitioners, who work in private organisations use and know the importance of new media as **Interviewee 1** and **Interviewee 2** indicated that their organisations use new media in the course of carrying out organisations' activities.

The above data show that a lot has changed in media relations activities since the advent of the new media, especially for multinational organisation or organisations that want to transcend the geographical barrier, thereby reaching their public outside their location. On a counter note, **Interviewee 4** and **Interviewee 3** expressed their preference for mainstream media relations. However, they still use new media to opine that they have social media accounts and post information online. Both the survey

and interview data show that organisations use new media, and this agrees with Duhe, Sandra (ED), (2012) in their book titled: "New media and Public Relations", according to them, Organisations are using Facebook and Twitter to build relationships and to communicate transparently".

**Research Question Two:** *What is the perception of Public Relations practitioners in your organisation about incorporating new media into media relations practice?*

Our perception of innovation is derived from how useful it has been to us and the satisfaction we derive from it. This study investigates how Public Relations practitioners perceive the new media. With the responses in table 5, it is worthy to say that majority of Public Relations officers see new media as an essential innovation as the case may be. This crucial importance of new media and the way the organisation perceives it has made its adoption grow faster in unimaginable ways. Table 5 shows that most respondents see new media as an essential and relevant innovation in media relations practice. These findings indicate that new media is critical, and Public Relations practitioners see it as such. This agrees with McAllister and Taylor 2007; they opined that public relations practitioners see the internet as a "unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinions on issues and engage in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues".

**Research Question Three:** *Do Public Relations practitioners find new media helpful in carrying out media relations activities?*

The survey data shows Public Relations practitioners find new media helpful in carrying out media relations. Table 6 verified that electronic communication through the internet is helping Public Relations practitioners when carrying out media-related activities as the number of the respondents who indicated that they find new media helpful is far greater than those who believed new media has not been beneficial. While table 7 buttresses the use of new media has been found helpful to public practitioners, a higher number of respondents indicated that they find new media very helpful and helpful, respectively. Data from the interview also buttresses the findings from the survey data. Two interviewees said that the new media has been beneficial to their organisations in carrying out their activities. **Interviewee 1** said most of their major clients are using new media, so they use new media channels to reach them. This agrees with Galloway (2005) "New media has a wider reach that

anything before it.”

**Research Question Four:** *Do Public Relations practitioners encounter challenges as they carry out media relations activities in the era of new media?*

New inventions in all spheres of life require learning and adapting; new media users, especially in a developing country like Nigeria, will be faced with myriads of challenges. Table 8 affirms this as most respondents indicated that they encounter challenges as they carry out media-related activities. The challenges as described in table 9 are; cybercrime, cost, Power supply, network failure, internet illiteracy, and false news. It is evident that the epileptic supply of power in Nigeria increases the cost of operation for organisations that use new media gadgets as they rely on the purchased power plant. Also, the inefficiency of the communication companies produces a poor network. A solid and constant network is needed to ensure Public Relations practitioners use new media effectively. One of the significant challenges new media faces is cybersecurity. A company's network may be susceptible to attacks from unauthorised personnel, leading to disruption and distortion of information the organisation intended to pass across and fake news disseminated to the public. Data from the interview revealed that fake news is a significant challenge in new media use as both **Interviewee 3** and **Interviewee 4** expressed their fear at the improper use of the new media by individuals who do not have professional expertise use it. **Interviewee 3** continues that through the new media in the wrong hands, the public is misinformed.

Many Public Relations practitioners, despite being academically inclined in their field of study, still struggle with the use of these new media gadgets. Another major challenge is that without the knowledge to use these tools effectively, public relations practitioners will not enjoy the advantages posed by new media while carrying out media-related activities. This equally agrees with James, 2007 "if new media are to be embraced, industry practitioners, new and old, will need to acquire more soft skills, such as in web publishing, new software, online security, and many more. Writing for cross-media delivery will continue as usual, but demands for multimedia elements will bring more challenges to them".

**Research Question Five:** *What role do new media play in media relations in an organisation?*

Regarding one of the interviewees, **Interviewee 1** said the role of new media in the practice of media relations in an organisation cannot be overemphasised

as he affirmed that the new media has been beneficial to reach out to most of his organisation's clients through new media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. Public relations practitioners relate with the media to reach its various publics and maintain an ongoing cordial relationship. As revealed by the responses in table 10, the new media is assisting public relations practitioners in passing quick information across to the public and the journalist. Some of the respondents indicated that the new media plays the role of disseminating information to the public; some respondents also indicated that the new media quickly gives information to the media. In contrast, most respondents stated a channel that transmits information to both the public and the media.

Timeliness is a hallmark in information dissemination. The new media is presently the fastest medium to reach journalists and the various publics of an organisation through email, blogging, direct chat, and social media. This finding is supported by Muhammad Shawal Abdul Rashid (2014); he examined "Public Relations & new media: a look at how new media has impacted today's practices of Public Relations". According to him, "The power of new technology cannot be underestimated anymore. Current society strives upon technology, where each and every one of the world's citizens is somehow linked via a massive network known as the internet".

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use of new media tools by Public Relations practitioners in public and private organisations in Edo State has been beneficial and has improved the maintenance of a cordial relationship between organisations and their publics. Media relations is now a core activity among Public Relations practitioners, and the use of new media to complement conventional media facilitates the effectiveness of media relations activities. The emergence of new communication technology and the rise of the internet have opened up a new vista of information that has never been seen before.

An organisation without good relations with its publics or that cannot tap into the usefulness of the new media is at the helm of demise. Public Relations practitioners in Edo state should advise their organisations to be cognisance of trending new media tools that will aid media relations since the media is pertinent to an organisation's image and relationship with its public.

Although Public Relations practitioners perceive new media as very important in media

relations, they still face numerous challenges while using the new media. Some of these practitioners have not been well trained to use the new media effectively; knowledge derived from Public Relations as a field of study is not enough. These practitioners should update their understanding of media tools, and acquire more skills, such as cybersecurity, web publishing, and many more.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The proper use of new media is critical to media relations for appropriate and effective use of new media in media relations activities. Arising from the findings of this research, the researcher recommends that:

1. Public and private organisations in Edo State should embrace information and communication technology in organisations and media-related activities to disseminate quick details to their public.
2. Public and private organisations in Edo State should do all they can to prevent hacking of organisations' media online activities and misrepresenting the organisation; cybersecurity measures be employed.
3. Public and private organisations in Edo State should constantly organise training and seminars on emerging new media tools for Public Relations practitioners in their organisation.
4. It is imperative that in public and private organisations in Edo State, the alternate power supply should be available permanently in case of a national power failure to avoid disruption of new media-related works.
5. Public organisations should not rely primarily on conventional media but use new media to complement their media relations activities.
6. Finally, both public and private organisations in Edo State should work with the Ministry of information and other information bodies to counter fake news circulation through new media.

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