

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN THE PROMOTION OF CORPORATE BRAND IMAGE AND REPUTATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

There is a notion that getting to adopt a new idea no matter the obvious advantages is often difficult and this has played out sometimes in the Nigerian corporate landscape, apparently owing to the dominant orientation of public institutions and the lack of basic and relevant infrastructure. This has contributed to the slow pace of development in the country. With the pervasive influence of social media globally, it became necessary to interrogate the relevance, role and effectiveness of social media platforms in the promotion of corporate communication, identity and status in Nigeria. This was contemplated because of the critical role communication plays in the life of organizations and society. The work was anchored on two related theories: the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Media Dependency Theory (MDT). An in-depth interview approach was adopted for data gathering. The targets were key experts with hands-on experience in the corporate communications arena, including public affairs managers, journalism practitioners, ICT experts and business development consultants. The tool employed was an open-ended questionnaire with follow-up telephone interviews. Findings point to the absolute necessity of social

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media and its various platforms in promoting corporate communication and building the identity and image of organizations in Nigeria, using the right strategies. Despite its shortcomings, which include believability challenges, there was a consensus on the need for organizations to embrace the social media regime if they have to remain relevant and meet their objectives.

Keywords: *Social Media Platforms, Brand Management, Corporate Communication, Nigeria, Public Relations*

Introduction

Technology has come to be seen in some quarters as a disruptive innovation. It makes products and services more accessible. It shortens long-distance communication and brings people in far-flung places into a common chat room; real-time online. Although evolving and innovative technological inventions have revolutionised the world and made things much easier for mankind (Wardynski, 2019); it has also tasked the faculty of organizations and professionals who now have to constantly race after new strategies to cope with the challenges thrown up by technological innovations (Qureshi, 2020). Innovative strategies have come to be a constant accompaniment of the corporate world, particularly the service and product industries, which not only have to routinely retool to meet current realities but must constantly update their capabilities and competencies in the face of competition. They either do so or perish.

Rapid technological inventions, particularly digital technology, have given greater impetus to the narrowing of the world space. It has globalised the world and in turn, affected its outlook and how things are done. Although Globalisation can be portrayed in several ways depending on the context, in some specific sense it could be seen as the free movement of goods, services and capital across borders; and it is viewed as an ideological project of economic liberalisation that subjects entities and individuals to more intense market forces. It creates and enables a faster track for interaction across the globe. Buchanan & Huczynski (2010) put it in context, that globalisation is "the

intensification of worldwide social and business relationships which link localities in such a way that local conditions are shaped by distant events".

George (2007) indicated that as media and communication structures and systems become increasingly 'corporatized' and globalized, new challenges of scrutinising their interlinkages emerge in many forms, tasking existing ideas and structures. The new media have been the challenge that the corporate world is now facing. So, organizations that must stay ahead of disruption must of necessity be deliberate about spending time and tangible resources to study their operational environment, refine their goals and rethink their strategy.

In this era where social media have become the immediate port of call for the average citizen and because of the narrowing gap between conventional and social media, it has increasingly become necessary that the body corporate gets into the game and become more involved in the relevant platforms – to reach both the conventional and social media audiences wherever they are with narratives that are beneficial to the entity, particularly in attracting and retaining attention, as well as holding meetings and transacting businesses (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson, Jain, Karjaluoto, Kefi, Krishen, Kumar, Rahman, Raman, Rauschnabel, Rowley, Salo, Tran, Wang, 2021).

Communication is a vital aspect of any engagement. Therefore, there is a need to engage stakeholders and the public and constantly update them on relevant information and developments arising from, and related to such engagements. Chambers (2022) explained that when social media networks began, they only provided a means for people to link up with friends and meet others with common interests; but as things evolved corporate entities got involved with the view to securing similar relationships with their partners and target audiences.

Content packaging and channels of presentation go a long way in the effective delivery of communication activities. This work, therefore, looked at the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Blog, Flickr, WhatsApp, etc., in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria; and the

eventual challenges that new technology has thrown up to identify the challenges and recommend possible solutions.

Statement of the Problem

In this age of accelerated digital communication, the desire to be instantly informed and engaged has escalated into various forms of mediated channels available for human participation and consumption (Van Belle, Hall, Riekert and Muganda (2007). These channels, known as the “new media” have significantly changed the way people live, work and interact with one another (Leonard, 2012). They have also become so entrenched in daily living and operations that those who don’t embrace or make the most of them would be on the deprived side of the societal and digital divide (D’Aveni, Dagnino & Smith, 2010).

Already, the perception out there is that corporate entities in Nigeria, particularly government establishments, are yet to substantially key into the digital world in their engagement with their public. While the government claims it is doing so much in delivering the dividends of democracy to the people, information about what it has done (and is doing) is substantially not in the public space. There seems to be some kind of disconnect in terms of communication between the government and a large segment of the people.

Therefore, this work focused on what strategies are being adopted and how the use of social media platforms can help in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria, establishing the extent to which social media platforms are relevant in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria; interrogating the effectiveness of social media platforms in developing corporate brand image and reputation in Nigeria and ascertaining the challenges social media could pose to corporate communication in Nigeria.

It is believed that findings will further increase knowledge about the corporate communication landscape in Nigeria, and particularly provide insight into the larger and professional implications of the impact of social media platforms in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Social Media Platforms and Vulnerabilities

A social media platform is a vehicle that conveys social media solutions and services. It is a web-based technology that allows the creation of content, dissemination and management of communication activities. The *IGI Global Dictionary* (2022) defines it as “a highly interactive tool using web-based and mobile technologies that provide individuals, communities, and organizations the means to share, co-create, discuss, promote, and modify user-generated content posted online.” These commonplace ones include Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, WeChat, TikTok, Pinterest, and Snapchat.

Organizations, and indeed individuals, today ignore social media at their peril. For example, social media helps organizations to improve brand visibility and loyalty (Edosomwan, 2011); understand the company’s culture better and enhance internal social networks in a cost-effective manner (Oyza & Agwu, 2015).

However, social media may yet be one area in the digital revolution that might have a longer shelf life with short-lived platforms. Unlike traditional media platforms that keep surviving in a symbiotic relationship despite technological evolutions, recent developments show that the business model in the digital technology industry is already changing with migrations from existing platforms to newer ones with more capabilities. For example, more users migrate from commonly known and used platforms like Facebook and Twitter to Instagram and TikTok; and from WhatsApp to Telegram which has more pixel stability.

As new platforms emerge, they trigger new waves of migration; because we now live in an uncertain world that is changing very fast due to globalisation and rapidly changing technologies with almost limitless possibilities. Notwithstanding, traffic on the platforms depends largely on the purpose and the audience targeted. For instance, while Facebook is commonly used for individual and group interactions, Twitter offers a variety of engagements: politically, socially, and economically, including multilateral and other world bodies, news agencies etc. Instagram seem to be a toast to the creative

industry; LinkedIn, for professionals; and even YouTube which is fast becoming a significant commercial playground for corporates.

The pervasiveness of social media has thrown up credibility issues in the media landscape and has further diminished the dwindling professional stakes in the media. This is because a large chunk of social media offerings are not subjected to any form of professional scrutiny; even in service and product marketing where bogus claims are sometimes made.

Siddiqui & Singh (2016) listed the negative impacts of social media on businesses including negative comments that can lead to an organisation's bad reputation and even failure; hacking, wrong online brand strategy that can ruin businesses because of its viral capabilities, issues with measuring results of campaign efforts; and can be time-consuming monitoring negative ripostes.

The addictive nature of social media, according to them, has a negative effect on society as it diverts attention from other endeavours which otherwise would have been more beneficial. People now spend more time on social media networking sites and this affects concentration, a development that has affected children's concentration of intellectual knowledge acquisition and behaviours; and has become one of the major causes of accidents on public roads. A major aspect that Siddiqui & Singh (2016) noted, which is commonplace everywhere is the invasion of individual and corporate privacy and false presentation of situations because social media offerings are largely unconfirmed, unprocessed, uncensored and unrestricted.

During election seasons as is the case in Nigeria at the moment, social media has become a very easy and available platform to spill and squeal against opponents. Even before the election season, it was used to fan and escalate religious and ethnic tensions.

In his recent outing, The All Progressives Congress (APC) presidential running-mate, Kashim Shettima said that social media is where truth goes to die in Nigeria (Usman, 2022). While not discounting the positive sides of social media, Shettima noted that social media do not only play host to fake stories but are now serving as platforms where truth is being murdered in Nigeria.

The reliance on social media offering has run Arise Television into a credibility crisis, the latest being the fake news published in November 2022 purporting the country's national electoral body's commencement of a probe against one of the presidential candidates in the country's 2023 general elections. *Arise TV* apologised for the gaffe and paid the fine imposed by the regulator, NBC (Agba & Oguntola, 2022). Even though the fine was paid, the reputation of the TV outfit has been sullied in the process. The material it relied upon was lifted from social media.

Notwithstanding, social media platforms have come to be seen as fundamental pathways for reaching relevant persons and groups in a fast-paced interactive manner. Just as indicated by the Digital Marketing Institute (2021), the doubts as to the relevance of social media platforms in corporate communication are off and there's no longer any question as to its necessity as a marketing tool for every business that wants to remain relevant and visible.

Corporate Communication: Influencing Relationships and Processes

This is important in the context of the relevance of social media to amplify messages. It is the way organizations communicate with their internal and external audiences and includes employees, customers, potential customers, the media, regulatory authorities, shareholders, etc., to achieve mutual understanding and a favourable/positive image. This also applies to government in enlightenment and mobilisation as communication remains the most essential tool to drive initiatives and policies, get buy-ins, and achieve goals and objectives.

Cornish & York (2011) while examining the link between communication strategy and national strategy found out that communication plays a significant role in supporting democratic development as well as stimulating economic growth. Despite its relative under-prioritization in development assistance, few dispute the power of communication, and in particular the catalytic role of the media in influencing governance relationships and processes.

Through the strategic use of social media, organizations have reached many more target groups/stakeholders and the messages

penetrate a lot more because often they are directed to defined individuals and groups or shared among groups likely to understand and appreciate the narratives. Organisations can create their content and reach large audiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, & Edosonwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour (2011),). Targeted digital campaign on social media is one-way organisations promote their brands to external audiences because today the world is driven by digital communications and organizations can share information easily and market their products and services with just a touch of a button.

The seriousness with which organizations accord social media can be seen in the importance they accord websites. Serious organizations have websites and social media handles even as they also work with traditional media platforms to give information and project their image, products and services. Corporate communication now uses an integrated approach, a combination of traditional and social media platforms for marketing communication (Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam, 2022).

Innovation, Corporate Brand Image and Reputation Conflicts

Innovation is generally seen as a creative way of making things and creating better and more effective products or services in the process. Albuquerque (2013) says it implies the articulation between an idea and an action to produce something new. Simply put, it refers to the act of doing something different.

In today's world where competition runs through every facet of endeavours with increased and varied resources and competencies, what stands for most organizations is the level of innovativeness of their human resources. In some cases, this would be seen as dynamic competencies, but it is simply the ability to react to the environment and create worthwhile offerings that would not just delight the customers or consumers but give the organisation a competitive edge, a brand image and a better reputation.

When an organisation decides to be innovative, it is likely aiming at a more convenient and cost-effective way of doing business or a more attractive way of creating and delivering products or services

to enhance its chances of success in the environment and to enhance its market share and achieve its goals and objectives. Some organizations are slow in embracing change brought by innovation not because they do not appreciate the advantages, but because they are also mindful of the consequences that indulgence might bring on the reputation of the organization. It is more so with social media which provides a seemingly unrestrained avenue for commentaries and social interactions.

This is however consistent with new realities, such as social media. Qureshi, (2020) pointed out that even as the innovative digital realities have helped in easing workload and easy interactions, it has also tasked the faculty of organisations and professionals who now have to be dynamic in their competencies to cope with the challenges thrown up by technological innovations. That implies a balance, even if adapting through convergence.

Analysing related issues, Johnson (1992), said managers often try to minimise the extent to which they are faced with ambiguity and uncertainty by first seeking ways of improving on existing strategies, resorting in the process to tightening controls; but digital innovations are often disruptive and leave managers with slim options. Decision-makers' rationality and information available about the alternatives and the future are often cited as the cause of ambiguity in embracing innovation (Arend, 2020).

Nonetheless, oftentimes innovation not only creates but chases opportunities. What an organization can do in a corporate communication space however is not just a function of envisaged opportunities, a great deal depends on how receptive an organisation can be to innovation and how far it can go in its drive for relevance, improved audience penetration and achievement of goals and objectives.

Globalisation has made it difficult for corporate bodies to rely on native intelligence in dealing with their audiences. This is so because there is so much development, contention and awareness in the global place. Organisations that fail to understand and respond to the dictates of their immediate and global environments and are slow to appreciate

the fact that their image and reputation are largely determined by the perception of their audiences are bound to learn bitter lessons in no distant time.

Time is of the essence in organisational procedures and is more so in times of change, disruptive change. It is a vital resource within any organization (Wilson, 2012). That is why organisations need to factor in the time of adjustment in their operational plan so that whatever changes, no matter how potentially beneficial, do not disrupt operations, with the accompanying negative consequences.

Therefore, planning and re-orientation are necessary for any climate change. If any organisation embarks on an innovation drive without first weighing the implications of the change process and making provision for fallouts, then it might end up ruining its brand image and reputation rather than building it.

Theoretical Framework

This work was hinged on two theories: Technology Acceptance Theory and Media Dependency Theory.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Momani & Jamous (2017) quoting Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) states that TAM essentially conveys the concept of how users may understand and accept new technology and how they may use it. It is an information systems theory that depicts how users come to accept and use technological innovations. The model is based on the assumption that when users perceive that a particular type of technology can add value to what they are doing and is also easy to use, they will willingly adopt and use it (Ajibade, 2018).

According to this model, two factors mainly determine the acceptability of new technology: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Charness & Boot, 2016 Allen, 2020). It is governed by the perception of potential users, not that of the innovator or manufacturer. Allen (2020) stated that TAM was designed when computers were introduced into the workplace to measure the attitudes of customers towards the new technology.

TAM was developed by Fred Davis in 1989 to predict and explain system use by both vendors and IT managers (Allen, 2020). It specifies the causal relationships between system design features, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using and actual usage behaviour. Users are usually confronted by several factors when presented with new technology, and such factors influence their eventual decision of how and when to use it (Allen, 2020).

Media Dependency Theory: The theory was proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach & Melvin DeFleur in 1976. It states that there is an internal link between media, audience and large social systems. It is assumed that learning from real-life situations is limited, so the audience can use media to get more information to fulfil their needs. Lin (2014) sees the theory as a systematic approach to the study of the effects of mass media on audiences in the first instance; and of the interactions between media, audiences and social systems.

Lin states that since the inception of the theory, many cross-disciplinary studies have been generated and have particularly been useful as a theoretical basis for research in the domain of political campaigns' communication. This is so because, in this area, the relationship between the mass media, the electorate, and the candidates is the central focus.

The major criticism against this theory is that it does not seriously consider individual differences in its contemplations since individuals use the media in different ways and are affected differently by the media. It largely predicts a correlation between media dependence importance and influence of the media.

However, Jung (2017) sees the theory from a multilevel and ecological framework which explains individual-level and societal-level conditions that influence the degree of importance of media in individuals' everyday lives. To that extent therefore the theory is relevant because it enables the assessment of the use of social media where the media plays a role in society (Nawi, Alsagoff, Osman & Abdulla, 2020).

Like most concepts and interventions in the communication and technology space, there are quite some related theories and models that can help put issues in perspective; some are built around the main concepts like the MDT and others are triggered by technological innovations like the TAM. As indicated by Miller in Dainton and Zelle (2018), theories provide people with an abstract understanding of the communication process. A combination of related theories is capable of providing a guide and giving a clearer picture of how to interrogate new concepts and approach new studies. It is the reason why these two theories are selected among other related theories.

The TAM and MDT are relevant in this study because they provided the window through which the subject matter of the study was understood and appreciated. The TAM gives requisite insights into user engagement on social media sites and other social-media-related business strategies, (Rauniar, Rawski, Yang & Johnson, 2014); and the MDT enables the assessment of the use of social media where the media plays a role in the society (Nawi, Alsagoff, Osman & Abdulla, 2020).

Research Method

The qualitative approach was used for this work with an in-depth interview technique as the instrument of data collection. In-depth interviews involve deep interaction with a small number of knowledgeable respondents to gain more perspectives on a subject matter. It uses an open-ended, discovery-oriented method, and aims at deeply exploring perspectives (Brounéus, 2011); and gathering rich background information that can shape further enquiry relevant to the subject in focus (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). The in-depth interview was augmented with follow-up phone calls to obtain more information and clarify certain issues raised during the interview.

Given the nature of the subject in focus, discretion was employed in selecting the sample population; only those with hands-on or requisite knowledge were approached to harvest quality responses for the work, especially given the size of the sample population. It was therefore targeted for the best possible and related responses from

industry experts with experience in dealing with a wide range of related issues.

Therefore, participants were purposively drawn from among sector experts ranging from public affairs managers, business development consultants, ICT experts, journalism practitioners and scholars with organizational communication backgrounds.

Formal requests through structured interview guides were sent to 32 participants domiciled in four major business hubs/cities in Nigeria, and the federal capital territory, Abuja. The cities are Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano and Kaduna. The exercise was carried out between November 19, 2022 and December 18, 2022. Twenty-four (24) of the targeted participants responded to the requests and participated in the exercise while eight did not. The in-depth interviews were conducted through telephone calls.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Male	17	71
Female	7	29
Total	24	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage
41-50	2	8
51-60	19	79
61 and above	3	13
Total	24	100%
Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
HND/Bachelor's Degree	3	13
Masters' Degree	17	70
PhD	4	17
Total	24	100
Occupational Status	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Consultant	4	17
Journalist	6	25

Public Affairs Expert	7	29
Academic	4	17
ICT Expert	2	8
Bus. Dev. Consultant	1	4
Total	24	100
Location Spread	Frequency	Percentage
FCT Abuja	6	25
Lagos	11	43
Port Harcourt	3	13
Kaduna	2	8
Kano	2	8
Total	24	100

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Source: Field Study, 2022

Table 1 shows that 17(71%) of the participants were male and 7 (29%) were female. Two (8%) were between the age brackets of 41 to 50 years; 19 (79%) were between 51 and 60, while three (13%) were 61 and above. Three of them (13%) were holders of first degree or HND, 17 (20%) were with Master and four (17%) had PhDs. Four (17%) communication consultants, six (25%) journalists, seven (29%) public affairs experts, four (17%) scholars, two (8%) ICT experts and one (2%) business development consultant participated in the exercise. Six of them (25%) operate in Abuja, 11(43%) in Lagos, three (13%) in Port Harcourt, and two each (8%) in Kaduna and Kano).

Table 2: Definite Response Pattern

No.	Issues	Yes	No	Compare-monetary	To some extent
1	The relevance of social media platforms in	24 (100%)	-	-	

	corporate communications?				
2	Social media has dragged corporate communications out of the dark ages of the past and into a brighter interactive future.	22 (92%)	-	-	2 (8%)
3.	The bond between social media and corporate communication is unbreakable	21 (88%)	2 (8%)	-	1 (4%)
4.	Adopting social media platforms for corporate communication in Nigeria, just like in other new ideas is difficult.	2 (8%)	21 (88%)		1 (4%)
5	Social media has displaced traditional means of corporate communication	-	1 (4%)	22 (92%)	1 (4%)

Source: Field Survey 2022

Table 2: Data Interpretation

Table 2 shows definite responses to direct questions that required definite answers even if supported by explanations. There was a unanimous agreement that social media platforms are relevant in corporate communications. Twenty-two (22) of the 24 participants agreed that social media has dragged corporate communications out of the dark ages of the past and into a brighter interactive future. Two disagreed. Twenty-one (21) that the bond between social media and corporate communication is unbreakable, two disagreed and one said it can only apply to some extent. Twenty-one (21) disagreed with the notion that adopting social media platforms for corporate communication in Nigeria is difficult. Twenty-two (22) participants did

not agree that social media has displaced traditional means of corporate communication; one said it has while another maintained that their roles are complementary.

Analysis of Research Questions

1. Communication strategies adopted by corporate bodies in Nigeria in developing corporate brand image and reputation

A significant number (20) were of the aggregate view that the use of social media in developing corporate communication, brand image and reputation entails getting the strategy right, knowing the potential outcome, studying and understanding user demographics to guide deployments (which also points to engaging with relevant audiences) and deploying the necessary platforms to suit relevant targets based on needs.

Also, strategies adopted depend largely on the services on offer, what is being communicated, the audience and the purpose of the communication.

Preference of the platforms largely depends on two things: the audience targeted and the communication objective because the platforms cater for different audiences. Twitter was mentioned as the most relevant platform used in Nigeria, followed by Facebook, then Instagram, Linked-In, WhatsApp, YouTube, Tok-Tok and Telegram, in that order. An aggregation of the views indicated that LinkedIn is where professionals are found; Twitter is where organizations strive to exist, as it serves as the virtual market to engage politically, socially, economically, and even multilaterally. Facebook might also be useful in these areas depending on the kind of corporate business, but Instagram was mentioned as mainly used by those in the creative industry while YouTube was also pointed as a significant commercial playground for corporates and creatives.

2. The extent to which social media platforms are relevant in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria

There was overwhelming agreement that social media platforms are relevant in corporate communication because they can reach targeted and diverse audiences easily and immediately. The general

position was that in today's digital and highly connected world, social media is the fastest medium for the exchange of information among interest groups that have things in common. It is really about connecting with people with the additional benefit of being able to humanize brands and help organisations improve brand visibility and loyalty, understand the organization's culture better and enhance internal social networks in a cost-effective manner.

That probably was why a significant number of participants agreed with the notion that the bond between social media and corporate communications is unbreakable; although two were not so emphatic because some organizations might restrict the use of social media as a corporate policy. One was emphatic that all communication can be broken, lost, damaged, distorted, and, or extinguished; it all depends on the organization's vision, mission, strategic objectives, corporate communications plans and commitment to implementation. However, they all seemed to be on a common ground, that it all depends on an organization's understanding of the new world order and how to harness communication in a digital world.

3. Effectiveness of social media platforms in developing corporate brand image and reputation in Nigeria

A significant number of participants indicated that social media platforms are effective on this score; and agreed that social media has dragged corporate communications out of the dark ages of the past into a brighter future. Even the minority (2) who talked about social media only being complimentary to the traditional media agreed that the former makes content creation easier and message delivery faster. The position of the majority was anchored on the belief that everything can now be thrashed in the open just like bargaining in an open market. They were of the view that through the strategic use of social media, many more target stakeholders are reached and the messages penetrated a lot more because of their transcendental and far-reaching nature.

Again, the effectiveness was obvious in the response to the lethargy that often greets the adoption of new ideas. The dominant

position was that although the adoption of innovations is often slow and perhaps challenging, this has not been the case with the use of social media platforms because the gains outweigh the pains. They pointed to the fact that organizations in Nigeria are mostly service oriented; and with the current fast-moving technology changes, organizations have no choice but to quickly adapt to continue to remain relevant.

Furthermore, a significant number believe that real social media engagements are achieved and should be measured by the interaction the messages elicit from the audience much more than the "likes" they attract from netizens. The views summarise that "likes" could be deceptive, and without engaging the content being shared 'likes' does not fulfil the purpose of the content shared. This is so because sometimes the "like" button is clicked without reading the content, and that does not say much about acceptance or otherwise of the content shared.

4. Challenges social media could pose to corporate communication in Nigeria.

The major challenges mentioned across the board included fake information and privacy issues: fake news, doubtful sources, trolling, negative publicity and dirty campaigns against organizations. As a consequence, there is a major believability challenge.

Discussion of findings

This work was out to (i) identify the communication strategies adopted by corporate bodies in Nigeria in developing corporate brand image and reputation; (ii) establish the extent to which social media platforms are relevant in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria; (iii) interrogate the effectiveness of social media platforms in developing corporate brand image and reputation in Nigeria; and (iv) the challenges social media could pose to corporate communication in Nigeria.

Objective 1: The use of social media platforms in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria entails getting the strategy right,

knowing the potential outcome, and studying and understanding user demographics to guide deployments - these form the summary of the positions of participants. There does not seem to be any specific strategy. The views hovered around engaging with relevant audiences and deploying the necessary platforms to suit relevant targets based on needs; including convergence with traditional media platforms for effectiveness. This is consistent with the position of Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam (2022), that corporate communication now uses an integrated approach, combining traditional and social media platforms for effective marketing communication.

The dominant viewpoint was that strategies adopted in developing corporate brand image and reputation depend largely on the services on offer, what is being communicated, the audience and the purpose of the communication. No two campaigns are the same; so it entails working with knowledge and understanding of what to put out, the public and the challenges; then adopting the right communication vehicles/tools to approach the campaign.

At the centre of these would be creativity (thinking outside the box), innovations, sharing stories with compelling messages (unique selling propositions), competitions and rewards. It means organizations have to constantly evaluate and innovate to remain relevant; which corroborates the observation by Qureshi (2020) that the reality of media has tasked the faculty of organizations and professionals who now have to constantly think up new strategies to cope with the challenges thrown up by technological innovations.

An integrated fit-for-purpose strategy was envisaged which also requires convergence with conventional and other traditional forms of the media. This aspect confirms Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam, (2022) observation that corporate communication now adopts an integrated approach in reaching out to targeted audiences. The important thing is that messaging must be consistent and targeted at its internal and external stakeholders to promote the organization's brand image and mission; and in the process engender greater loyalty, confidence and stakeholders' satisfaction.

Objective 2: The thoughts of participants summarise that in today's digital and highly connected world social media is commonly used as a medium for the exchange of information among interest groups that have things in common. It is really about connecting with people with the additional benefit of being able to humanise brands and help organizations improve brand visibility and loyalty, understand the organization's culture better and enhance internal social networks cost-effectively.

These further pushed the frontiers of the relevance of social media in corporate communications and align with the position of the Digital Marketing Institute (2021), which states that there is no longer any question as to the necessity or relevance of social media as a marketing tool for every business that wants to remain relevant and visible; and Chamber (2022), who noted that it was just a matter of time before social media became a veritable tool for corporate entities and brands to connect with their target audiences.

Given the fact that corporate entities in Nigeria are mostly service-oriented, the need for organizations to quickly adapt to continue to remain relevant cannot be over-emphasised, particularly with the current fast-moving technology innovations, some of which are disruptive.

Objective 3: The effectiveness of social media platforms in developing corporate brand image and reputation was generally seen from the point of its ability to amplify messages and create a connection that enhances the achievement of mutual understanding and a positive image.

With social media, organizations can create audience-specific content; and this is one way they promote their brands to external audiences. It enhances quick interactions. It's easily accessible. It produces quick results. It is affordable. Its audience is large. It makes connections and interactions much easier; and this aligns with the postulation of Wardynski, (2019) that evolving and innovative technological inventions have revolutionised the world and made things much easier for mankind.

Some responses indicated that organizations now use a combination of traditional and social media platforms for effective marketing communications; which again is the position of Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam (2022). Significantly, data analytics, big data, algorithms etc. have made it possible for organizations to easily target information and communication to desired demographics at a fraction of the costs that existed in the analogue era. The dominant view was that despite the abuses, social media makes communication more interactive.

A case in point was the massive deployment of social media to great effect during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (2019 – 2021) when health agencies and other organizations used the platforms to disseminate information about the scourge and related issues. Social media platforms became the easiest and the most efficient means of connecting with the public. Meetings were held online just as work and assignments were similarly carried out, especially as physical contact was restricted. So, in the social media space, true value comes in illustrating how the respective audiences engage with the content being shared on these platforms. Engagements by way of comments (including feedback), “shares” and “tags” are more tangible evidence of the success of a campaign on social media.

Objective 4: The dominant views of participants indicate that as effective and beneficial as social media have been, there are also some drawbacks. The first challenge is abuse by users with the consequent low believability. There is also the question of illiteracy and deliberate infiltration of communication channels with unsolicited messages from trolls and puppets; and connectivity challenges which hinder instant accessibility to messages, as well as the paucity of data.

In a setting where basic infrastructure like electricity and internet connectivity remains a challenge, systems collapse are regular occurrences and this affects instant delivery and access to messages. Also because of the pervasive nature of social media, there is no hiding place for the brands any longer as every slip is exposed almost instantly; which is why media-facing professionals must be adequately prepared

for any eventuality because social media is largely an uncensored community where people of various orientations find expression.

Control is difficult as there seem to be no rules of engagement; therefore hacking and infiltration of communication channels with unsolicited and diversionary messages create privacy issues. A combination of all these throws up the challenge of credibility. Fake and uncensored information, therefore, becomes a major threat to corporate communication. Views expressed here agree with those expressed by Siddigui & Singh (2016), who pointed to the invasion of individual and corporate privacy and false presentation of situations due to the largely unverified, unprocessed, uncensored and unrestricted content on social media platforms. Participants expressed concern over the lack of control and stemming of diversionary messages. A participant labelled social media an uncensored community where people from various backgrounds play unsolicited and sometimes tendentious roles.

Tendentious as this might sound, the common feeling was that social media has only expanded the scope, democratised the space in terms of being more participatory, interactive and quickening the response process; therefore, the collaboration of both social and traditional media would add and better enhance value to corporate communications as a whole. This strengthens the positions of earlier studies by Edosomwan et al. (2011), Dallarhide (2021) and Saleh (2022).

Conclusion

The summation of views expressed shows the critical nature of social media platforms and the extent to which they are relevant in the promotion of corporate communication in Nigeria. Social media on its own cannot guarantee effective delivery as effectiveness depends largely on adopting the right strategy which would necessarily depend mainly on the offerings, the audience, the tools and the purpose of the campaign.

Even with expressed concerns in some quarters about social media displacing the traditional media; such concerns were largely dismissed though it was variously admitted that the influence of the traditional media is waning. For now, the words to use in the

relationship between the two are “increasingly dominant” and “complementary.”

This position regarding the traditional might shift later as technology evolves, but for now, it does not seem likely; instead, social media have only expanded the scope, democratised the space in terms of being more participatory and interactive and quickened the response process. These no doubt help in the promotion of corporate communication, identity and image in Nigeria. Notwithstanding the fears about the infiltration of privacy and the vulnerability of image and identity, the overall process would have an additional impetus - to add and enhance value to corporate communications as a whole, through an integrated approach involving the traditional media.

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