

NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND THE CHALLENGES OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research looks at the fundamentals of corporate communication, a crucial part of communication that helps organizations retain credibility and mutual relationships with their internal and external audiences in the age of new media technologies. It allows for a qualitative assessment of the importance of new media technologies as it is used in corporate communication in Nigeria, as well as the establishment of various contemporary corporate communication instruments and the determination of acceptable corporate communication strategies. Despite a number of issues, including the cyber crisis, limited technological penetration, and a lack of finance, to name a few,, the findings support the claim that new media technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, and videoconferencing, among others, which now overlap with various media of communication due to technological innovations and convergence, have transformed corporate communication practice in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Newmedia, Corporate Communication, Convergence, Challenges and Technology.*

Background to the Study

There is no doubting the importance of communication in our everyday lives, with the average employee spending 50-80% of their workday conversing with coworkers. That is why psychologists stress the value of efficient communication in both personal and professional interactions. While one-on-one communication is relatively straightforward for humans, we occasionally need to express crucial messages to big groups of people. According to Akarika, Ekanem and Ukpe (2017) citing Soola (1998) communication plays a critical role in all aspects of organizational activities. Similarly, communication is a bond that ties people together in an organisation and business and organisational life (Akarika, 2021).

Corporate communication refers to how businesses communicate with their numerous stakeholders both internally and outside. Customers and potential customers, employees, investors, the media and the general public, government agencies, and third-party regulators are just a few of the stakeholders. Corporate communication clearly encompasses a wide variety of tasks. Corporate communication is not the easiest of obstacles to overcome, which is why institutional proactiveness in this area is required. Organizations must recognize the value of communication and the role it plays in the company's success and bottom line growth.

Everyone is a stakeholder and reporter in this new world. Consumers and the general public can now control the dialogue twenty-four hours a day, via a variety of devices. People have power, and they determine what can and cannot be done. That is where today's connections are established, as well as where brands and companies are built or destroyed. The goal is to join the dialogue and design appropriate company storytelling based on a shared purpose that puts citizens, consumers, and customers at the center of corporate choices. When responding to facts and situations, businesses must be genuine, diligent, and upfront, or a tough situation may worsen. People change with the times, and an organization's approach to ensuring good communication among its ranks must change with them.

People can communicate more quickly thanks to technology. It is now possible to employ more than one mode of communication because to technological advancements. People can now communicate with each

other through email, social media, chat messengers, video conferencing, video calls, photos, videos, symbols, graphs, charts, and emoticons, among other things. The landscape of business communication has been irrevocably altered by technology. We can communicate more quickly, effectively, and easily. New gadgets, tools, and software are being released to expand communication technology, while existing popular internal instant messaging platforms are being upgraded and improved on a regular basis. Work productivity has benefited greatly from effective communication channels such as instant messaging, conference calls, and video conferencing. As a result, virtual office technology has eliminated workplace boundaries, allowing businesses to expand more quickly than previously anticipated. Businesses may engage with the public and stakeholders in real time via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, which also serve as important public relations tools. With the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT) our society continues to move forward into the "Information age" (Drabier, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

For a long time, corporate communication was restricted to public and press relations, as well as event planning. This sort of communication was aimed at a small group of people, both internally (workers) and outside (shareholders) (customers, prospects, suppliers, prescribers, bankers, investors, opinion leaders). This traditional approach of corporate communication is being challenged by new technology and the separation of communication within the organization. It is considerably more difficult to communicate nowadays, but it is even more difficult to be heard and trusted. According to Kilgore (2003) cited in Akarika et al (2021) employees are the most important of all corporate communication audience... without employees, there is no organisation.

The role of corporate communication is to manage the organisation's media relations, crisis communications, external communication with the public or investors, and internal communications between management and employees. The way we communicate and conduct business has changed dramatically as a result of technological advancements. It is the most useful tool we have, and new devices, programs, and platforms are added all the time. Because of society's reliance on technology, businesses must employ communication using these tools to be successful. Landlines and desktop computers were once the only means of communication, but now cell phones and laptops allow us to work effortlessly while on the road, at home, or in the office. But, perhaps most critically, technology has altered the way we communicate with our clients and with one another. Organisational success depends on the level of trust and honesty that develop through ongoing communicative experience among employees (Akarika, et al. 2021).

The corporate communications organisational structure is always altering and diversifying as new technology is introduced. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented Reality (AR), for example, are changing the way companies communicate with customers and how businesses connect with them. It is against this backdrop that this study examined new media technologies and the challenges of corporate communication practices in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories namely: Computer Mediated Communication theory; and Technology Determinism theory.

Computer Mediated Communication Theory

This theory focuses on the role of interactivity between parties through mediated channels of communication (Rafaeli, 1988). The postulation of CMC is on the relationship of new messages with preceding messages, rather than on the number, content, frequency, and timing of the message exchange. In both face-to-face and mediated communication, interactivity is possible and focuses on the responsiveness between conversational partners. Interactivity provides acceptance, satisfaction, and engenders thoughtfulness, sociability, and mindfulness (Rafaeli, 1988).

Computer technology increases the manner in which interactivity occurs, disbursing communication from a point-to-point exchange as seen in face-to-face interpersonal communication, to a network whose interaction is supported by the structured nature of technology (Holmes, 2009). Technology has provided a new medium through which communities can co-construct their social realities across traditional geographic and temporal barriers. This theory is relevant to the study directly as it provides a framework for its application in

organisations based on its interactive role between employees through mediated channels of communication such as new media technology.

Technological determinism theory

Technological determinism, is defined as "the belief that technology have an over whelming power to influence human activities, "which leads to societal change, according to Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006).

This theory states that media technologies shape how individuals in a society think, feel, act and how a society operates as we move from one technological age to another (Griffin 2000), corroborating McLuhan's theory, that we learn, feel and think the way we do because of the message we receive through the current technology that is available. (McLuhan 1962). The theory basically explains the fact that changes in communication technology produce profound change in our societal order. Here, communication technology is seen to have the power to transform the sensory capacity and therefore transform the way we live our life. Technological determinism is a reductionist theory that aims to provide a causative link between technology and a society's nature.

It tries to explain as to whom, what could have a controlling power in human affairs. The theory questions the degree to which human thought and action is influenced by technological factors. The term 'technological determinism' was coined by Thorstein Veblen and this theory revolves around the proposition that technology in any given society defines its nature. Technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course of history. Karl Marx believed that technological progress lead to newer ways of production in a society and this ultimately influenced the cultural, education, political and economic aspects of a society, thereby inevitably changing society itself. He explained this statement with the example of how a feudal society that used a hand mill slowly changed into an industrial capitalist society with the introduction of the steam mill.

This theory is relevant to the present study because technological progress through the use of new media lead to newer ways of doing things in an organisation which ultimately influence the organisational communication.

Literature Review

Since new media becomes more prevalent in organizations, it is critical to gain a better grasp of how it has influenced how organizations communicate internally and publicly. This section begins with a definition of organizational communication and a discussion of studies that has emphasized its influence on businesses.

Corporate Communication and its Technological Impact

Corporate communication makes use of technology to effectively communicate a company's message to internal and external stakeholders. It's clear to see how technology has changed the way we communicate in the corporate world in Nigeria, where the majority of people own a smartphone and have access to a computer or tablet. New technology's speed, accessibility, and flexibility have drastically altered the way corporate communications teams function, and businesses are scrambling to keep up. The way corporate communications plans are developed and implemented has changed dramatically as a result of new media technology. Internal and external communications teams are frequently divided in corporate communications departments, although both can offer social media material to keep the public and stakeholders informed about company activities.

How has technology changed the work of media? Technology allows people to converse more swiftly. Because of technology improvements, it is now feasible to use more than one channel of communication. Email, social media, chat messengers, video conferencing, video calls, images, movies, symbols, graphs, charts, and emoticons are just a few of the ways people may now connect with one another.

Organisational Communication

Researchers, such as (Santra & Giri, 2009), may "now explore how communication affects all aspects of an organization's operations thanks to organisational communication. Communication will always be a vital part of an organisation since it connects each individual function and group as a whole, as well as being the mechanism through which an organisation is both established and perpetuated" (Santra and Giri 2009, p.13). Every business needs communication because it allows individuals to shape the culture via their own viewpoints, strengthening organisational identity and allowing the organisation to realise its potential goals (Modaff, DeWine, & Butler, 2007; Santra & Giri, 2009). Modaff and colleagues (Modaff et al.) (2007), claim

that, "Organisational communication is considered the process of creating, exchanging, interpreting (correctly or incorrectly), and storing messages within a system of human interrelationships" (p. 3). Santra & Giri (2009) further point out that this dynamic process aims to influence a specific behavior rather than simply transmitting information.

The importance of organizational communication has long been recognized by researchers, as seen by the ever-growing amount of work that has investigated it in a number of settings. Thus the purpose of communicating messages in an organization has to do with the essence of sending and receiving messages within the organization... as well the function each message is supposed to perform (Akarika, 2021).

Organisational Effectiveness

Organizational performance, according to Kreps (1985, p.109), is "depending on how well organisation members are able to communicate and utilise relevant information". The usage of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has recently had a significant impact on organisational effectiveness by improving both internal and external communication capacities. Because it has produced greater equality and less social pressure, CMC has enhanced the participation of organisational members (Santra & Giri, 2009).

According to Santra and Giri (2009), organisational members can "slowly construct shared meanings and develop a sense of organisational identity" through computer-mediated communication (p. 106). While face-to-face communication is still the most effective form of communication within an organisation, doing so on a daily basis is no longer viable in most organisations, leaving most organisational processes to rely on CMC (Santra & Giri, 2009). According to Akarika et al (2021), the success of any organization depends on the efficiency and effectiveness of its communication system and the nature of the independent relationships. Technology improvements have continued to increase the quality of work by allowing organisational members to communicate more efficiently on a regular basis, hence increasing the organization's overall effectiveness.

Social Media

By allowing users to co-create and share information with others, social media has had a huge impact on our culture and the way we interact, connect, and define relationships. In the opinion of Cavico, Mujtaba, Muffler and Samuel (2013), "social media" are "web-based internet networks where users may exchange content and connect with other users in a group setting" (p. 26). Technology (such as the internet and mobile phones) is used in social interactions using any combination of words, photographs, video, or audio. Smith (2012) used the term "social media" to describe it, "this participatory approach enables users to "connect, socialise, exchange email, documents, images, video, and audio files, and do so in a number of ways." (p. 24).

Social media has produced numerous platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, that have fundamentally revolutionised the way that friends, family, coworkers, and others communicate on a daily basis as a result of their participation in the development and distribution of certain types of communications. Scholars from a range of fields have continued to embrace social media as a study topic since it has continued to have a big influence on our culture and society. In 2012, Khang, Ki, and Ye conducted research on:

the trends and patterns of research papers on social media in advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations. While the usage of social media has increased in each of the four disciplines, they discovered that the "vast majority of social-media-related publications (76.8%)" were published in communication journals (p. 286).

Academics have been paying a lot of attention to social media, according to their results, and they feel this is an attempt to keep up with the growing popularity of this new communication medium. Social media, as a whole, is a distinguishing feature of modern society, and it has become an integral component of how people engage in personal and professional relationships on a daily basis.

Media Technology in the Workplace.

As additional types of social media emerge and the business world grows more competitive and complicated, organisations are becoming more active in their use of social media to preserve their organisational position. Businesses have placed a premium on learning how to properly manage and comprehend the usage of social media as a result of its ever-increasing popularity (Di Staso, Mc Corkindale, & Wright, 2011). Social

media has become a significant part of many firms' integrated organisational communication strategy due to its cheap cost and "user-friendly" ways of "sharing user-generated information" (Fischer & Reuber, 2011, p. 2).

Because of its dynamic capability, the social media's use in organisations can have a positive impact on the consumer's experience, enabling for the adjustment needs to change over time (Sashi, 2012). According to Sashi (2012), "customers become champions for sellers in encounters with other customers and non-customers as the exchange gets more relational and the emotional attachments become stronger" (p. 268). This exchange of information between consumers and user-generated content has enhanced satisfaction and advocacy, as well as strengthened customer engagement, for businesses that have adopted social media as a marketing strategy (Sashi, 2012; Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

Social media is a subset of communication, allowing businesses to interact and exchange information with their customers on a more frequent basis (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). By allowing for interactive and dynamic exchanges between individuals and organisations, social media has revolutionised the way people communicate both internally and internationally. The growth of social media has resulted in an engaged dyadic dialogue that includes both users' and organisations' perspectives (Reitz, 2012). As a result, businesses are becoming increasingly interested in building a social media presence in order to engage with consumers and influence their experiences while also using social media for increased marketing impact (Lipsman, Graham, Rich, & Bruich, 2011).

Research Methodology

To ascertain the challenges posed by new media technology on communication practice in Nigeria this research adopt a qualitative research method which according to Kuehnast, Jones & Woolcook (2006), refers to a range of data collection, and that use purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews. It interpretative material practices that makes the world visible (Mohajan, 2018).

Review of Empirical Studies

Akarika et al (2021) carried out a study on computer mediated communication and academic performance of university students in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to ascertain the level of exposure, determine the level of dependence, determine the level of application and gratification derived from the use of CMC by university students in Nigeria. The study found out that majority of respondents (61%) agreed that the level of application/dependence in CMC was very little and unsatisfactory. The study further revealed factors affecting CMC implementation to include poor quality of signals, learners perception of social presence in CMC, lack of data, inadequate computer/laptops and inadequate electricity. The study recommended that the level of application/dependence on CMS should be improved.

In another study by Olley (2009) on New Media technologies and their challenges to broadcasting in Nigeria which was designed to find out the challenges posed by new media technologies in the industry which include illiteracy and lack of expertise, high cost of equipment government bureaucratic policies among others. The study revealed that practitioners in broadcasting sector understands the new media technologies as an indispensable tool meant for their effective operation and perceive that new media technologies are new to them. The study recommended that broadcasters should fully embrace and adapt to the use of new media technologies in order to fully remain relevant in the industry.

Importance of Media Technologies in Media Relations

Emerging forms of communication media, according to Fidler (1997). Olise (2008) adds a fresh perspective to the discussion by stating that new media have influenced media relations in one way or another. When using new media, public relations professionals can perform more effectively and efficiently. This is because new media has been shown to boost job efficiency and speed while also lowering costs. Furthermore, new media allows media relations practitioners to engage with the media in novel and innovative ways, which helps to create trust in both the media and their viewers. Other issues of the role of new media in media relations are discussed and handled farther down.

1. Increasing the effectiveness of two-way communication.

The internet and mobile phones, for example, allow for two-way communication, which is the basic purpose of good media relations. "There are chat rooms for virtual discussion where users have the option to connect on-line," according to Ayankoji (2001). A message entered and delivered in a chat room displays nearly instantaneously on the computers of other users in the same chat room, 24 hours a day. New media also encourages engagement and feedback. Take, for instance, cell phones. These new mediums enable media relations specialists to engage with reporters and, in some cases, obtain immediate reaction. Furthermore, the web is "interactive in nature," as Rodney (2005) points out.

2. Improving a Positive Image.

The mere fact that an organisation has a website, much alone one that is beautiful, well-organised, and consistently updated, can assist to improve its image. Having a website also improves worldwide recognition. A Nigerian corporation, for example, with an active website, would surely be well-known worldwide. People and media outlets are more willing to associate with companies that have a good image across the world. People are more likely to come across a company's profile with a website than one without.

3. Improving the Company's Image.

As a result of the feedback mechanism, human communication has become a more robust activity, in addition to the duty placed on organisations and other entities on the internet to justify their operations, explain their mission, and respond to difficulties (Adedina et al. 2008). Indeed, new media makes it simpler for firms to discover what their consumers think about their corporate image, reducing the danger of assuming they are well-liked by their customers. Because most new media include this feedback mechanism, they may be used to keep businesses informed about how their consumers feel about them. As a result, any misunderstandings or crises that may have arisen can be avoided and resolved.

4. Make Public Relations Planning and Implementation Easier.

New media makes public relations easier, quicker, and less expensive to a large extent. In a matter of seconds, e-mail and electronic bulletin boards, for example, "may convey message back to source" (Rodney, 2005). Professionals in public relations may use the Internet to perform rapid and cost-effective research, formulate policies, and obtain feedback on how well the process is working. News releases can be sent to media outlets via new media technologies such as e-mail and mobile phones. All of this can be done faster, easier, and for less money with the aid of new technologies.

Furthermore, modern technology overcomes distance and time constraints, increases media communication, and provides a plethora of other advantages. In truth, even if all corporate communication tactics are used, any organisation that does not employ new media technologies in this technological era would surely lag behind worldwide trends.

Strategies of Corporate Communication

To survive and flourish in this competitive environment, organisations in Nigeria, as well as corporate communication practitioners, must employ a variety of methods. As a result, it is incumbent on an organization's corporate communication department to develop successful communication methods. Tench and Yeomans (2006) provide some basic rules for effective relations as follows:

- i. Assist the media by answering inquiries, returning calls before deadlines, and providing context and information.
- ii. Recognize the media's independence; do not offer payment or request copy approval.
- iii. Make your interest known, i.e., tell the journalist who you represent.
- iv. Make yourself as accessible to the media when there is negative news as when there is positive news to promote.

In order for the parties concerned to successfully follow these principles, they must follow appropriate media relations rules.

Cuttip et al. (2006) offer the following recommendations for excellent media relations:

- i. Shoot Straight: When interacting with the media, the most crucial asset is credibility, which must be built over time. If you are unable to communicate the truth due to legal or regulatory constraints, say nothing.
- ii. Providing Services: The quickest and most reliable way to gain journalist collaboration is to provide them with newsworthy, intriguing, and relevant stories, as well as photographs that they want when they want them and in a format that they can use. Media relations professionals who want to place articles in new media must be aware of and follow media deadlines.
- iii. Don't Beg or Carp: Nothing frustrates journalists, editors, and news directors more than practitioners who beg for stories to be utilised or gripe about how stories are handled. No amount of begging or whining will change the fact that material is not sufficiently newsworthy on its own merits to pique their interest.
- iv. Do Not Request Kills: Practitioners have no right to request that a story be suppressed or killed in the media. It's regarded as a slap in the face to media gatekeepers. Request a correction - rejoinder if the media report is wrong or misleading.
- v. Donot Flood the Media: Stick to what journalists deem news, keep media mailings hot and current, and send the most relevant journalist to each news outlet.

New Media Technologies: Challenges of Corporate Communication Practice In Nigeria

New media is increasingly being used to plan, execute, and practice efficient business communication. Corporate communication practitioners in Nigeria are now embracing new media technology because of the numerous benefits that come with it, and this has assisted in successful practice in the twenty-first century. Regrettably, Nigeria looks to be lagging behind in the creation and application of new media in many areas of life. The cyber crisis, Nigeria's low penetration of New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs), corporate communication departments' lack of financing, lack of knowledge, and inadequate power supply are only few of the factors that have contributed to this terrible event. We'll look at a couple of these elements in more detail below.

1. Cyber Crisis

This is one of the most important elements influencing corporate communicators' usage of new media. Media relations professional do not work for themselves, but also for an organisation. As a result, corporate communication experts must be cautious not to make any mistakes that could jeopardise not just themselves but also the business, particularly when using new media such as the internet. The internet revolution was not without its flaws. It has concerns with human system failure, network issues, virus issues, and a variety of other issues. "Spam" and "false news," according to Campbell et al. (2009), are two more issues with the internet. This, along with other similar situations, is referred to as a cyber crisis.

Anyone can cause havoc, stir up controversy, or tarnish the image of a corporation or a person in any organisation in this age of new media. By posting a contentious piece of information on the internet, even a disgruntled employee or a small/large number of people can tarnish an organization's image. This would undoubtedly have a negative impact on good communication. However, one of the quickest ways to combat a cyber disaster is to respond quickly to any such material posted online.

2. Low Penetration rate of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Although the world is growing increasingly digital, LDCs like Nigeria still have a low degree of technology penetration. "It will take several decades for LDCs to create a systematic, efficient, and reliable ICTs" new media technologies, according to Danaan (2006). However, since most LDCs have come to realise that practically all new technologies are essential in almost every aspect of life, they have begun to take substantial efforts by implementing legislation that encourages the acquisition and usage of new media. Nigeria, on the other hand, continues to lag behind other countries.

Furthermore, in Nigeria, internet, e-mail, and mobile phones are not commonly available, economical, or efficient. Consider e-mail: when sending messages with attachments, opening the file takes a long time and, in some circumstances, does not open at all owing to the nature of the network used to save money. One of the primary reasons for Nigeria's low technology adoption is the high cost of obtaining and maintaining new media.

The majority of new media is developed and designed in Europe, Asia, and America, and imported into Nigeria at a premium cost due to the high foreign currency rate of N480 to \$1.

3. Poor Funding of Corporate Communication Department

Corporate communication should be viewed as a significant investment. Unfortunately, most organisations overlook the department's necessary funding, particularly for the acquisition of new material. "Will some Nigerian organisations be able to withstand the cost of acquisition and upkeep of ICTs?" questions Ikpe (2006). Indeed, in this era of new media technologies, insufficient funding has played a significant role in poor communication practices.

4. Lack of Expertise

In this era of new media technologies, corporate communication involves knowledge in both the practise and application of new media technology. It also necessitates sufficient training for employees in the corporate communication department.' Nigeria lacks the necessary expertise. Early practitioners included people who "rose through the ranks and graduates from other disciplines like Marketing, Psychology, Journalism, Linguistics, and others who did not receive any formal training in either public relations" or media relations to enable them to function effectively in government and business organisations, according to Okafor (2002). Even those who read Public Relations are not up to date on all of the new media's applications and are not regularly trained in this area. The key to unlocking this component is consistent training.

Even those few who claim to have a fair or strong understanding of new media usage for the profession of media relations in Nigeria are severely impeded by the country's unreliable power supply. The majority of contemporary media devices necessitate a consistent and reliable power supply. Unfortunately, for a long time, this has been a mirage in Nigeria. All of these issues, if not handled correctly, can jeopardise the practise of media relations in this era of new media technologies.

Conclusion

Corporate communicators have no choice but to continue strategizing and evaluating how specific practises of these platforms have supported their organisations internally as well as allowed for optimal engagement with their consumers and the public as new media becomes an omnipresent form of communication in today's society. The findings of this study revealed that media technology is a continuous process that occurs as a result of the medium's dynamic and progressive structure, as well as the organization's unique qualities.

The issues facing business communication in Nigeria in the age of new media technologies appear to be alarming and should not be overlooked. Efforts to reduce these issues are the responsibility of all stakeholders participating in the profession, both directly and indirectly. The Nigerian government, media organisations, corporate organisations, government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), people, and public and public relations practitioners are among those who are affected. The issue necessitates advocacy for deliberate and conscious government policies to address the numerous challenges, as well as a rallying cry to all stakeholders for a solution.

Recommendations

These suggestions are made in response to the discussion above;

1. Corporate communicators must ensure that their interpersonal relationships with media gatekeepers are retained and mutually maintained, as the media serves as a springboard for the promotion of their organisations' image.
2. Organizations in Nigeria, who appear to be falling behind in frequent staff training, must guarantee that their employees are sent for regular training all over the world to keep them up to date on shifting communication trends brought on by new media technologies.
3. Appropriate finance for the corporate communication department is critical, as money is required to offset some media costs and to allow media relations experts to move quickly. Indeed, personnel charged with communicating with the media in order to represent and safeguard their organization's interests may not be able to function as expected without money.

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