SOCIAL MEDIA AS A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR CORPORATE COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social media has become the market square for which those who have something to market and those who have a stake in the offerings converge to canvass their thoughts, express their buy-in and remain relevant in business and society. Those who do not find space in the market place either by default or design risk being left behind in the atmosphere of relevance. It was observed that though Nigeria has the resources and competences, the deployment of social media in propagating the necessary offerings to mobilise acceptance and cooperation was not very profound. This work set out to examine the relevance of social media as a strategic tool for corporate communication in Nigeria. The work was anchored on the Theory of Technological Mediation. Findings reveal that though social media have been embraced by, and largely deployed in the private sector because of the sector's competitive and result-oriented dispositions; same could not be said of the public sector which, more than the private sector, requires the mobilization of the masses of the society for the buy-in and participation in its programmes and activities. The work therefore recommends the need to engage stakeholders and the public through the social media to constantly update them on relevant information and developments arising from, and related to such public sector activities, particularly as it affects the people and their well-being.

Keywords: Social Media, Corporate Communication, Nigeria, Public Relations, Strategic Tool

Introduction

Several studies have clearly indicated the importance of effective communication in the life of an organization or any corporate entity. Communication has been variously described as the life blood (Zink, nd), life wire (Bluehaven, 2019), Life line (Sangare, 2017) and a very fundamental part (Paolo, 2018) of business development in an entity.

Paolo (2018) stated that because of the indispensability of communication in organizational life, it deserves more attention compared to other areas of corporate existence. Zink (nd) adds that it is "a building block of successful organizations". Given these classifications of communication in an organization's operational hierarchy, effective communication in an organizational life can only be downplayed or undervalued at the detriment of the stakeholders, particularly the owners/managers.

Organizations exist basically to further the interests of the initiators, satisfy stakeholders (Khemka, 2020) and contribute to society where required; but the primary aim remains to make progress, improve on returns and remain relevant/competitive. In a bid to achieve these, those charged with directing responsibilities device means that would best suit the mission of the entity and package them in such ways that would enhance the operational environment and guide strategies likely to deliver the goals.

However, when faced with new challenges and the consequent pressures to manage perceptions and keep pace with competition, directors look for better ways of enhancing the social capital and remaining relevant because of the ever-changing nature of society which does not beforehand signal all the influences that could conceivably affect the future of the organization.

Because of this reality and the challenges of the unknown, the veritable option becomes playing with ideas that could possibly aid achievement of results and distinguish an organization in competition and relevance. Innovation is always handy here and those in charge play a vital role in exploring and developing innovation skills as they initiate 'the objectives, goals, methods, processes and procedures that enhance competence exploitation as well as identify favourable opportunities for new technological or marketing competence' (Teece, Peteraf & Leih, 2006, pgs.13 - 35) and Molina-Castillo, Jimennez & Munuera-Aleman (2011, p.7).

Just as new technology alters the pace in production processes and procedures in an organization, it does same to the communication process – both in terms of infrastructure and content packaging. The new wave of communication application powered by technology has fostered a new brand of communication reality on several platforms which has made reach and coverage much easier and the facilities readily available. The combined nature of the new avenue is referred to as social media. Dollarhide (2021, pg.1) sees social media as "a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through virtual networks and communities."

Chamber (2022) indicates that at inception social media was just a means for people of shared interests to keep in touch with each other, but it was just a matter of time before it became a veritable tool for corporate entities and brands to connect with their target audiences. An earlier position on this by Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, and Seymour (2011) indicated that the social media is a space allowing for interactions with other users, where content is shared, and where they express their personal views. Chamber (2022) noted that corporate entities in the developed world have gone beyond sharing and expressing personal views and are using the platforms to great advantage in enhancing relationships with their audiences. Therefore, online technologies as exemplified by the social media have radically transformed the way individuals and corporate entities relate among themselves and do business (Olsen & Christensen, 2015). How relevant this has been in corporate communication in Nigeria is what this paper seeks to explore.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Technological Mediation

This theory focuses on the relationship between technology and human existence in society. It offers a framework to analyse the roles technologies play in human existence and in society. Its central idea is that technologies, when they are used, help to shape the relations between human beings and the world.

According to Verbeek (2015), the theory sees technology not as material objects opposed to human subjects but as mediators of human-world relations. It was rooted in the post phenomenal approach in philosophy of technology which was founded by Ihde (2009).

This phenomenon of technological mediation has implications for philosophical theory and for practices of design and technology development. However, Liu (2022) posits that given the understanding of the perspectives of technological mediation as severally put forward by Idhe (2009) and Verbeek (2015), the theory inevitably leads to "moral suspension" which he sees as a structural problem in the technological era where modernity is constructed by contemporary technological civilization.

Nonetheless, the theory is relevant to this work because the central issue here is the role technology-enabled social media plays in

corporate communication which is about the effectiveness of the interaction between corporate entities and their publics in the society.

Review of Related Literature

Nature of Social Media

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian educator, philosopher and scholar, in his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of the Typographic Man* (1962) had predicted the shrinking of the world space with the gradual fusion of communication and technology. He used the term "The Global Village" (p.31) illustrate his thought process. That was almost 30 years before the advent of the World Wide Web (www) which has become the information super highway today.

McLuhan made the prediction during the age of printed and broadcast communication. However, about three decades after, the *www* narrowed the world space much more than the scholar would have imagined within a short space of time. This development has become both a catalyst and a challenge, although the world has become smaller as a result.

Before the technological revolution, especially the digital aspect, the Newspaper, Radio and Television were the media of mass communication in most parts of the world, with Magazine and Book adding specialised and intellectual perspectives to widely dispersed, but less heterogeneous audiences. The handlers of these media were specially trained with defined codes of practice.

Today, however, what is termed the New Media, where social media finds expression, has made distribution and dispersal of information faster and more interactive. There is an increased urge for information and more available space for interaction (Mitcham, Taylor & Harris, 2021). The audience has become much wider and heterogeneous, and the transmitters/receivers have become much varied, cheaper and readily available. Information distributed is uncensored – largely unprocessed and virtually unverified. It is now possible to mobilise the world from a spot for education, commerce, politics and even revolution. The difference between the old and new media is basically that the New Media are digital, interactive, hyper-textual, networked, virtual and simulated. Social media, a subset of New Media, requires the network effect to create value (Banton, Mansa & Kvilhaug, 2022).

Social media can be seen essentially as web-based communication arena through which users create content, share information as well as engage and participate in social networking. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that it is a group of internet-based applications that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content, which includes web-based and mobile-based technologies that are used for interactive communication among individuals, organizations and communities. Peshkar (2015) describes it as a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration; a critical resource for engaging with target audiences, getting their feedback and expanding visibility.

Damota (2019) echoing same, said it is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to carrying out all the activities listed by Peshkar (2015). Saleh (2022) in *New Media* explains the difference between social media and traditional media as being in the "democratization" of the content production and dissemination.

The commonplace social media platforms in Nigeria include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, blogs, online newspapers, and the YouTube. According to Sasu (2022), Nigeria had 32.9 million active social media users as at January 2022. WhatsApp is recorded as being the most popular platform used in the country, with over 90 million users. Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram followed as the most used social media platforms in Nigeria. Estimated number of Twitter users in Nigeria by August 2022 was put at 5.1 million.

WhatsApp is a messaging app that uses the internet to send messages, images, audio or video. Facebook allows users, who sign-up for free profiles, to connect with friends, colleagues or even unknown people. Users can share pictures, music, videos, and articles, as well as thoughts and opinions with a large number of people they choose. Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app available on mobile phones (iPhone and Android) where users can upload photos or videos and share with their followers or a select group. It has facilities for viewing, comments, etc., shared by their friends. YouTube

is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch or create, and upload online videos. Twitter is a site that connects people and allows them to share their thoughts with a big audience through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. Tweets may contain photos, videos, links, and text posted on profiles and sent to followers.

The Role of Social Media in Corporate Communication

Social media play a critical role in corporate communication because it is seen today to be the space where large pools of information, service and product consumers gather. The space is becoming wider and more connected, interactive, participatory, integrative, community based, ubiquitous, and digital (Ekeanyanwu & Kalyango, 2013), cited in Anyanwu & Orji (2020). The interactivity, trust and institutional pressure that such gatherings engender, positively influence social media usage in organizational activities (Parveen, Jaafar & Sulaiman, 2015). The pervasive influence (of social media) has, as a result, changed the world radically from an impersonal/passive communication arena to an active conversational and transactional environment, thus changing dramatically how society is seen and how it operates (Kemka, 2020).

Today, platforms presented by these digital technological tools are employed widely and precisely by corporations in order to facilitate and improve communications and engagements. Gomez-Vasquez and Soto-Vllez (2022) in their study noted that it is now obvious that social media is changing the way corporations and stakeholders interact daily, providing opportunities for collaboration, participation, interactivity, and engagement. According to them, because of the role social media is playing in revolutionalising communication activities, corporate entities around the world are not just attracted to, but are making use of social media in diverse ways including for customer service, marketing, internal communications, public relations or corporate social responsibility, among others. Anyanwu and Orji (2020) indicate that individuals, corporate and geo-political entities are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and other e-media platforms to mobilise masses of people to support

and advance their interests.

Gomez-Vasquez and Soto-Vllez (2022) strengthened that position by indicating that corporate entities now appreciate social media as a strategic communication partner that provides new and unique possibilities for escalating conversations with stakeholders and respective publics.

Chambers (2022) states that social media allows audiences to view brands, links employees and customers, facilitates employee advocacy, and makes for improved collaboration, among others. Social media therefore can be used to increase knowledge within the system just as it can enhance interaction with external publics. The platforms also offer avenues for feedback and evaluation.

Communication on social media platforms encourages interaction and engenders a sense of belonging thereby enhancing motivation and dedication towards accepting and achieving corporate objectives. Okoro and Diri (2009) add the free participation and personal touch aspect of the social media which reaches individuals directly even if the messages are directed to large audiences; that interest groups and corporate bodies reach out to their audiences through the social media which gives the advantage of staying in constant contact.

Social media can be used in several ways to stay in contact with the relevant audiences including to find out where the relevant audiences are; to share relevant information and valuable contents, to engage with followers, to remain relevant and to remain compliant.

According to Manavik-Raj, Joseph and Jesus-Milton (2015), social media helps those in the corporate communication field to build and maintain relationships with all their publics; just as they noted that in today's business world the reputation of an organization or institution also depends on how much image it has built on social media.

In view of these, compelling contents and effective dissemination through appropriate channels can radically change both the understanding and perception of an organization, particularly when employed for enlightenment, reorientation and advertising campaigns.

Impact of Social Media on Information Dissemination

Content packaging and channel of presentation go a long way in the effective delivery of communication offerings. The way a message is conceived, couched and delivered has great impact on how it is received, perceived, appreciated and internalized (Paolo, 2018). Unlike in the conventional media where messages are largely impersonal in delivery, social media content are often directed at specific targets with the dominant orientation of the targets/audiences in view. Badea (2014) in his study of *Social Media and Organizational Communication* posited that social media today are central to how information is obtained and exchanged; as such organizations, whether private or corporate, need to develop new approaches in corporate communication. Social media, according to his findings, could become significant tools of organizing communication.

Because of the pervasiveness of the social media, information is readily available and that makes products and services more accessible with resultant impact on the origin and intentions of the content originators. One of the most fundamental impacts of the social media is that it has shortened long distance communication and has brought people in faraway places into real time proximal distance online (Cheprasov, 2022). This has given greater impetus to globalisation and ease of doing business. It is seen as one of the most fundamental ideological projects of economic liberalisation that has subjected entities and individuals to more intense engagements because it creates and enables a faster channel for interaction worldwide.

Just as the social media provides an invaluable means of disseminating information, it is also a ready tool of misinformation (Inazu & Onwih, 2022). Meserole (2018) observe that the flow of misinformation, particularly on Twitter, is a function of both human and technical factors. Explaining the human aspect of it, he said since people are more likely to react to content that taps into their existing grievances and beliefs, inflammatory tweets will generate quick engagement. People hide under the anonymity that social media provides to inflict their audience with fake, uncensored, unverified and often unprocessed and unauthenticated materials. In Nigeria, examples abound in respect of information woven around the status of politicians vying for political offices, labelling and profiling of ethnic groups, insecurity, the economy and even in times of national and global emergencies like the COVID 19 pandemic ((Inazu and Onwih, 2022); and the recent flood menace in some parts of the country. The source of, and response measures on the flood scourge have been subjects of social media conjectures and manipulations.

At the height of the COVID 19 affliction, conspiracy theories found expression in the social media; and people were confused as to the authenticity of the virus, the veracity of the claims by the authorities, the scope of afflictions, the remedies and implications of non-compliance with both the protocols and remedies, including the vaccines (Shahsavari, Holur, Wang, Tanherlini & Roychowdhury (2020). Considering this double-edged propensity of the social media, Obi-Ani, Anikwenze and Isiani (2020) held that just as the importance of social media is obvious for information engagement in Nigeria, same way is the abuse, especially during critical periods of emergency.

In spite of the negatives, a proper interrogation would reveal that the significance of social media outlets cannot be underestimated when it comes to information dissemination.

Corporate Communication and the Nigerian Corporate Climate

There seem to be paucity of relevant information about what is really going on about the country, particularly in government circles; not because things are not happening but because they are not being communicated through readily available and appropriate channels to reach the people in the format they can easily understand and appreciate. That leaves the communication arena with conjectures and fake news. Recently during his working tour of Imo State, President Muhammadu Buhari lamented that his administration has done a lot but not well publicised (Sahabi, 2022). The apparently frustrated President insisted that in relative terms considering the time and resources available, his administration has done extremely well, but he would not know why those who are supposed to publicize and market the accomplishments are not doing so. The reason might not be unconnected with the communication infrastructure available to those who are supposed to do it, their

orientation, their competences and capabilities. The contents may be available, but the channels of communication may be defective, especially in an environment steeped in processes and procedures; an environment bent on maintaining the status quo, even if not delivering results. The financial position of an organization determines to a large extent how far it can go in achieving its objectives because it provides the basis for other competences and capabilities (Atrill & McLaney, 2011).

This development might also be remotely connected with the disposition of the colonial days when government communications were largely embedded in files labelled either "Secret" or "Confidential" or both "Secret and Confidential." Even matters of public interest are classified. That mentality still pervades the public service and affects their response to modern realities that require open communication for effective enlightenment, mobilisation and participation.

The public service even up till now prefers physical files to electronic or digital files and it has been one of the major reasons why corporate communication within the public service remains a matter of processes and procedures. They prefer dealing with, and using conventional media platforms where communication is controlled and directed to audiences within limited range. The private sector, even if corporate, is a lot better apparently because they are largely dealing with both internal and external competition; and would require the best and current methods available to reach their audiences, to remain relevant and for the attainment of set goals.

The nature of Nigeria's public sector and the orientation of the top echelon of the leadership, which is largely analogue, makes the proper understanding and easy appreciation of the benefits of new media and its almost limitless capabilities difficult. The issue then is: should there be any difference in approach to implementing change based on technological innovation that has disrupted the status quo? The answer certainly is obvious if an organization must remain in contention and in competition. To be realisable there must be change in attitude, aptitude and activity (Shehabuddeen, 2007).

According to Shehabuddeen (2007) these can be spread across because they are largely fostered and sustained by the structural and cultural attributes of the system. He noted that any change process within an organization must of necessity take into consideration these three key factors for a successful and effective result. This is so because deeply held values and principles that have become embedded in the operational psyche of the workforce as well as the peculiar competences aligned with existing structural frameworks have be re-oriented, realigned and made to believe in the initiative. This may take different forms depending on the type and scope of the change, but they remain fundamental factors that must be considered.

Naturally people have different ways of doing things and when locked with it over time, it becomes an attitude; and influencing long held attitudes is usually a herculean task except the outcomes are graphically explained and the benefits outlined. The same applies in the life of an organization or system that has a culture that strictly defines behaviour and operational policies. There must be a debriefing process that would dispel or modify entrenched values and principles complete with incentives that would cushion triggered apprehensions and inspire a change of orientation, otherwise there would be resistance. This observation by Shehabuddeen (2007) aligns with the nature of the Nigerian public service, particularly where disruptive innovation that might alter or change the intellectual approach and technical capability of the workforce is envisaged.

It has been observed, from an insider perspective, that the selfish dispositions of the key operators of the system also make them not to be comfortable with new ideas, particularly ideas that would require putting out to the public the type of information that might question the productivity level and the competences of those saddled with running the business. The bureaucracy and red-tapism, which are like cardinal corners-stones of the archaic public service, present great obstacles to the implementation of new ideas, even if acknowledged to be faster and better. Rogers (1995) underscored this position when he stated that getting to adopt a new idea no matter the obvious advantages is often difficult; a development he said poses a common challenge among individuals and organizations on how to speed up the rate of diffusion of an innovation. The procedure of conducting official business and management of affairs is the issue here.

Penc (2012, p.368) quoted by Kaczmarek (2018, p.45), defined management as the "Control of processes, resources and innovations in organizations to achieve the intended goals within the existing possibilities, conditions and limitations in accordance with the economic and social rationality of economic activities." This presupposes that at every point management must be prepared to adapt and adjust to environmental stimuli, to remain relevant and achieve objectives.

In this digital era, only those who are ready to adapt and adjust can flow with the times and achieve fundamental goals. Only the very innovative survive in the corporate world (Rafi, 2020), as social media have become a veritable tool to engage with the public, attract attention and build reputation, manage crisis, launch and grow campaigns, and get immediate and direct feedback. Those in the public service seem to fear the dark side of social media but embrace the bright side. This is so because on the social media platforms there seem to be no hiding place.

To achieve goals, carry stakeholders and followers along, and beat internal competition, a corporate entity must leverage on available and relevant resources and competences. Managers of corporate entities must understand that competition extends beyond immediate environments and ingrained perceptions; and therefore, must be equipped to flow with current capabilities for dealing with emerging threats and competition.

Apparently faced with the threat posed by digital evolution, Nigerian businesses are beginning to invade digital devices planting their apps and drawing attention to their offerings and campaigns. They have corporate social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other online windows on their websites to drive traffic, which in turn generates comments from followers, patronage, innovative ideas and compliments. It is common today to see "Like us on Facebook;" "Follow us on Twitter," "Let's have your comments" etc., on the web pages of corporate websites and also at the end of their offerings on social media platforms.

Social Media Application in Corporate Communication in Nigeria

The afore-going gives a picture of how relevant social media is in today's communication landscape globally. It shortens long distance communication and brings people in far flung places into a common discussion arena, real time online (Soto Herrera, 2018). It has become the global digital village square. 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 pursue new ideas and 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 do not only have to routinely retool to meet current realities, but must constantly update their capabilities and competencies in the face of competition.

Organizations now send bulk messages to mobile phones and similar handheld devices to draw attention to programmes, projects, campaigns and other offerings. They also create channels for feedback and direct participation by readers through digital interactions. This is to constantly keep their brands before potential, fair weather and loyal customers. Even the marketing aspect of their operations has shifted to the web as technology has completely changed the face of the business transactions.

Apparently because of stiff competition and perception management, organizations are now more concerned about how people see and perceive them; and would therefore need favourable dispositions for positive identification that would make the most impact on their audiences. Before now the audience, though heterogeneous and widely dispersed, could be defined in terms of location and demographics; but in the digital age and on the cyber platforms, the world becomes the audience and perception becomes more challenging. Liking and sharing of materials on social media platforms makes destination indeterminable.

Before the age of digital technology, organizations used to target relatively defined audiences and territories, but with the opening of the cyberspace to everyone, the world has become a common marketplace, not so defined and not so regulated; it has become a single region with diverse psychographic attributes, whose diversities would have to be considered at the

same time. Linos (2018) says social media have opened several opportunities such that when fully explored enhances effective communication in the corporate world. For him, the social media is the future of corporate communication.

That means that managers would have to think deep and act fast, to not only reach the audiences from different angles and different platforms, but meet their expectations through the offerings relative to those platforms; because as Jocelyn Cripps, *Financial Times* Executive Vice President quoted by Handley (2013) pointed out, effective communication is not just about the platform but more about offering a better, more complete audience experience. According to her, information consumers do not just change because of the platforms used, but persuaded also by the content of communication.

Challenges in the use of Social Media Platforms in Corporate Communication in Nigeria

As already indicated, rapid technological inventions, particularly the digital technology, have given greater impetus to narrowing the world space. It has redefined the focus and direction of the media and communications, especially diverting attention from, and indulgence in local/cultural practices to universal perspectives and thus revolutionised the world and made things easier for mankind ((Wardynski, 2019). In this age of accelerated digital communication, the desire to be instantly informed and entertained has snowballed into various forms of mediated channels available for human consumption (Van Belle, Hall and Riekert, 2008). The channels have also become so entrenched in our daily living and operations that those who don't embrace or make the most of them (be it individuals, governments, corporate organizations, and even non-profits) are likely to be consigned to the narrow side of the competition divide.

Also, with the rapid nature of events across all sectors affecting a broad spectrum of persons and groups, there is need for constant engagement and updating of the people on relevant information and developments arising from policies, developments and plans that affect them.

Although the role of social media in effective communication and mobilisation of the people is common knowledge in Nigeria, there are constraints that have made implementation, particularly in the public sector, an uneasy task (Aleyomi and Ajakaiye, 2014; Shinkafi, 2016).

i. Orientation of the public service: The most likely constraining factor in the Nigerian public service is the unwavering romance with 'processes and procedures' unmindful of the negative implications on efficiency and effectiveness. This is one phenomenon that modernity has not yet been able to conquer in the Nigerian public service; and it is the bane of efficiency in the sector. Unnecessary attachments to such bureaucratic procedures and corruption often undermine efficiency in the public service (Akpan and Onyia, 2018). Innovation and strategy suffer in the contest of dominance in the sector.

One of the worst affected areas in the public service is communication. There is almost absolute secrecy in the handling of official engagements particularly in the civil service; not necessarily to protect official confidential transactions, but to cover up frivolous and dubious indulgences. The colonial administration introduced secrecy into the transactions of the service but this was largely for confidential purposes. Departments even in the same Ministry seem to be working in silos; and although there are supervisors that are supposed to coordinate activities between departments and units, the supervisors become the architects of other silos that would protect their own dealings. Public servants hide behind the Oath of Secrecy and the Civil Service Rule to keep vital information away from the public, (Oji, Nwachukwu & Eme, 2014). Such classifications they noted have become the façade for corruption and ineptitude in the service and an abuse of the oath of secrecy.

Although Oji, Nwachukwu and Eme (2014) focused their study on the Peoples Democratic Party, the oath of secrecy administered to staff of the party mimics that of the Nigerian public service. According to them, the oath was administered to staff as part of efforts to control information within and outside the party. That is what happens also in the core public service.

Unfortunately, re-orientation is not usually in contemplation because it would upstage the status quo. Innovation and strategy are also not given consideration because the development would distort entrenched norms. Consequently, even if it is budgeted for in terms of procurement and updating of facilities, recruitment and training of relevant staff, and implementation and other related logistics, the money hardly gets deployed for what it was meant. Training in the public service has become a veritable avenue for siphoning funds for a jamboree while procurement serves as a smooth avenue for fraud and misappropriation of funds. Osakede, Ijimakinwa, Adesanya, Ojo, Ojikutu and Abubakar (2015) classify this set of corruption as the worst as the allocation, release and use of money is executed by government officials.

ii. Funding: Since communication is never given serious attention in the public service, it is usually the least subhead to get appropriate allocation. So, provision is hardly made and upgrading of communication infrastructure usually suffers. It has been observed that most of the Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at the federal level in Nigeria have Information Communication Technology (ICT) units under the Administration Department, where the main function of the Information Officers is to publicise the activities of the head of the establishment while the Communication Technology section handle computers and accessories and upload materials on the websites from the departments in the establishment. That is why the websites of the ministries are hardly updated or functional. A strategic ministry like that of Budget and National Planning (even when it was stand-alone), for instance, does not have an interactive website with active social media windows.

In spite of the pretentions that its website platforms are interactive, the claim is unfounded as they are not in reality (check nationalplanning.gov.ng); but this is one facility that funds are budgeted for, and spent every year. Very critical information about the activities of the ministry are not there. A click on the social media platforms yields nothing; which indicates non-functionality. Given the strategic nature of the organization, being in charge of planning and allocation of resources for the country,

information about its activities should be online, real time. According to the head of the ICT Unit, the unit exists purely as a technical arm that ensures internet connectivity and computer configuration. It is about the internet connectivity, not the content. Staff of the unit only posts materials sent to them by the departments. An interrogation of the website (nationalplanning.gov.ng/) shows that more than 80% of the postings have to do with the Minister's engagement, not necessarily the activities of the ministry.

A particularly curious agency seems to be the National Library, which hardly interacts with the public nor have functional platforms for online interaction. The social media handles are dormant. An attempt to procure an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) or the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) would reveal the parlours state of corporate communication in the Nigerian public sector. Same situation applies in almost all the ministries. Four attempts by to get an ISBN number for our book, *The National Conversation*, between January and February 2022, proved a herculean task because everything was done manually and the numbers were copied from a paper file instead of generating them digitally. Individual workers in the department use their personal devices to send correspondences to applicants. In my own experience, which seems to be a general fare, after series of personal contacts following delays in forwarding the number, the head of department, Uche Iroabuchi (2022), sent the following message through his personal phone line: "I must apologise for the inconveniences the delay may have caused you. Please check your mail now, I just called my staff and he confirmed that he has just sent it."

This happened three weeks after the first request. And this requires physical presence even though it is indicated in the billboards within the premises that the numbers could be obtained online. Even after following all the directions online, it yielded nothing and the payment platform *Remita* returned the money paid.

From the postings on the NOA website (noa.gov.ng/), it is glaring that nothing serious happens there. The agency which was created to raise awareness and sufficiently mobilize citizens to act in ways that promote peace and harmony, parades stale news on its website; and it proclaims

that the website is the major voice of the agency (noa.gov.ng/). With more than 5000 staff spread across the 36 states of the federation and FCT and more than 15 engagements platforms, the agency claims to reach 64% of Nigeria's citizens (noa.gov.ng/). It claims, on the website, that no other organ of government has that kind of spread and capacity for public enlightenment and sensitization campaigns. It speaks volumes of the seriousness of government to reach the people if this calibre of establishment suffers this nature of disability.

Out of twenty respondents picked randomly from the media community, seventeen claimed they never visited the website because the agency itself seems to be redundant; two of the remaining three said they stopped visiting the site because it offers no useful information. The deduction here is that the staleness of the news materials on the site shows that it is just there to fulfil all righteousness and not to function as a veritable information window for government to regularly and consistently raise awareness, positively change attitudes, effectively influence values and behaviours; accurately and adequately inform; and sufficiently mobilize citizens.

However, the narrative is different in some critical institutions in the public sector, largely in the financial, oil and gas, and security services, like the Central Bank of Nigeria, Budget Office of the Federation, Debt Management Office, National Bureau of Statistics, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited, have websites with interactive windows; and even these allow limited access and offer guided responses to inquiries.

A cursory look at these institutions reveal that they have international linkages and global transactions which make adapting modern communication trends inevitable and, in some cases, mandatory for them to be up to date in their transactions and interactions.

iii. Infrastructure challenge: Added to the unhelpful orientation is the infrastructure challenge, which has increased the cost of putting up and maintaining the technological structures that enable social media systems to work. The first is epileptic power supply which has been a major problem to every other sector of Nigeria's economic and social life. Running of social media support structures require uninterrupted power service. Epileptic power supply is a common feature in the country and across the African continent and it poses a major challenge hosting and maintaining digital infrastructure (Augustine, 2022). The cost of procuring and maintaining backup infrastructure like giant electricity generators, inverters, solar systems and a battery of 'UPS' facilities is huge and not sustainable in the public service system where budgets are streamlined and operators are not so concerned about service delivery.

Another unfortunate situation is that even where the hardware and applications are available, the tendencies within the system make it cumbersome to generate and disseminate appropriate and relevant content materials. A first-hand experience in the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (2016 – 2019) revealed that divisional heads hardly release materials for distribution even with appropriate authorisation from the minister. They decide what to release, whether it serves the purpose of not. Also, as a member of the Presidential Economic Communication Management Team, the experience was not different. So, the issue might not specifically be infrastructure deficit and funding, but largely that of orientation, competences and capabilities.

iv. Competences and Capabilities: Although a large pool of technologically and digitally savvy professionals abound in the country, one of the common afflictions in the country, nepotism, has seriously slowed down efficiency and productivity. This phenomenon which flows across Africa and the developing world has an inherent tendency of reducing efficiency and causing internal conflicts in the public, and even the private sector (Ombanda, 2018; Shilamba, 2021; & Bekesiene, Patrauskaite & Markeliene, 2021). Just like what happens in other sectors, incompetence and unseriousness have been a major challenge to the effective use of the social media as an effective tool in corporate communication in Nigeria. In the ever-changing world of digital technology, capabilities must be dynamic and competencies upgraded constantly. Because effective communication does not seem to be a priority in the public sector, hiring of highly competent staff is not of critical consideration.

Unfortunately, the low remuneration in the public sector is a critical challenge even if there were to be a drive for competent and capable personnel; and this situation affects efficiency and output. Olufemi (2015, p.1) observed that "the Nigerian public sector has low productivity as measured by its output in relation to its capital and labour inputs." According to him, this problem is largely a fallout of government's non-sustainability action towards labour and its nonchalance towards poor wages and incentives offered public workers. So, those with special skills are rather attracted to high paying engagements in the private sector like the banking, telecommunications, corporate marketing, oil and gas, hospitality sectors, etc. Some would rather go on their own, and provide services to dedicated clients or whosoever requires their services, so long as they can afford it.

Conclusion

In this era where the social media have become the immediate port of call for the average citizen and because of the narrowing gap between the conventional and the social media, it has increasingly become necessary that the body corporate gets into the game and become more relevant on the respective platforms – to reach both the conventional and social media audiences where they are, with narratives that are beneficial to the entity, particularly in attracting and retaining attention, as well as holding meetings and transacting businesses.

Communication is a vital aspect of any engagement. Therefore, there is need to engage stakeholders and the public and constantly update them on relevant information and developments arising from, and related to such engagements. This technological mediation of practices and perception has profound impact. By implication, users, designers, and policy makers are charged with the responsibility of getting actively engaged in shaping this impact. It is more so because social media has become, particularly for government and corporate businesses, an excellent place to interact with constituents, launch campaigns, create and build awareness around initiatives, as well as being an essential tool in crisis communications and management.

In view of the enormous capabilities of the social media and the need for effective and intensive information dissemination, corporate entities who want to remain relevant and connected to their audiences need to key into modern communication trends. And, the social media outlet is now seen as the global village square.

Recommendations

With so much competition in the industry and the challenges thrown up by technology and its fallouts, the importance of innovation, the dedication and commitment to the pursuit of innovation and continuous improvement must therefore be incorporated in the mission and vision statements of organizations that intend to survive in today's competitive environment. Therefore, organizations must:

1. Change their orientation to align with current realities
2. Embrace modern technology and systems to enhance efficiency and easily reach and interact with stakeholders and critical publics
3. Routinely retool their facilities to meet current evolutionary trends, and
4. Must constantly update their capabilities and competencies in the face of intensive competition by exposing staff to modern trends through constant training in the relevant areas, capacity upgrade on new technology and incentives for innovative ideas.

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