Technology Acceptance Model and Social Media Influence On Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

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Technology Acceptance Model and Social Media Influence On Public Relations Practice in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This paper is focused on how Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has influenced public relations practitioners' use of social media in their PR communications. It was established that Perceived ease of use and Perceived usefulness of a technology, in this instance social media has a direct link on whether the PR practitioner will use it in his PR communication. Public relations is not just building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics through traditional public relations tools. Public relations has gone beyond image building and sustenance of goodwill with the aid if conventional PR tools. The onus of this responsibility rest on the public relations practitioner who has been allocated this responsibility. The advent of social media has impacted the activities of public relations practitioners in their PR duties in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: public relations, social media, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

INTRODUCTION

Public relations is concerned with managing public opinion of a business, organisation or product. Public relations has overtime proven to be a crucial tool used by both public and private organisations to build mutual beneficial relationship, improve and sustain their reputation before their publics. An organisation's survival to a reasonable extent is dependent on the viability of its public relations activities. In support of this, Ogwezi and Umukoro (2018) opined that an organization that wants to thrive must as a matter of necessity have good reputation with its public. Nwanne (2016) asserted that an organisation's goodwill is earned through the activities of an individual or corporate body. Public relations has become generally accepted as an important

element of business, government and all aspect of everyday life (Amadi and Umor, 2020). They added that viable public relations practice helps in promoting harmonious and untroubled work place environment, increased productivity, corporate discipline, organisation's credibility, performance, capacity and the quality of its products or services. According to CIPR (2010) 'Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics '. The public relations efforts of the organisation are deliberately planned and executed to gain mutual and beneficial relationship between an organisation. These efforts are targeted towards not just establishing but also sustaining the earned goodwill with its publics. The World Assembly of Public Relations (2019) sees public relations as the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organisation's leadership and implementing planned programmes of action that serve both the organisation and the public's interest.

Public relations aims at making the public think favourably about the institution, organisation, company and its offerings. According to Nikhila (2020), public relations activities is gaining ground and increased recognition in every aspect of human endeavour from individual to corporate bodies whether in promoting products or image building. Corroborating this, (Igben, 2022), stated that in recent times, corporate entities have established offices in charge of corporate communications or public relations in order to communicate the organisation's mission and activities to its publics.

Public relations help in establishing goodwill, create viable relationships and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with the organisations' publics. The Public relations practitioner uses communication to reach these publics. The public relations practitioner does this by possessing robust, effective and creative communication skills in writing and presenting in order to be able to clearly and persuasively express his organisations views to its diverse publics. He should as a matter of necessity be able to propose and manage events that create opportunities for its organisation to interact with their publics and develop a discourse (Badaru, n.d). An organisations' publics are all those affected by the organization's activities.

Public Relations in Nigeria
In the 1940's, public relations was introduced into the country with the creation of the very first public relations office in Nigeria. The public relations office which was established by the colonial masters was involved in more of propaganda than actual public relations and therefore do not really deserve to be referred to as a public relations department. This however marked the start point of formal public relations practice in Nigeria. Its main function was to present Nigeria as a reputable country to the outside world in addition to assisting the government in all its propaganda activities.

The department had created three main units by 1946   which namely:

i.   The Publications Section
ii.   Hospitality Section
iii.   The Press and Publicity Unit

Public relations in the private sector started in Nigeria with United Africa Company (UAC). The development of the country also led to the development of public relations as it has evolved over the years. In his desire to advance the cause of public relations in Nigeria, Dr, Sam Epelle founded the Public Relations Association in Nigeria in 1963 where he was able to bring professionals together. The association transitioned into Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) in 1972 and was chartered under Decree16 of 1990 under the government of General Ibrahim B. Babangida. Dr. Sam Epelle is seen as the father of public relations in Nigeria today (Nwanne,2015)

The Influence of Social Media In Public Relations Communication In Nigeria
Public relations practitioners aspire to create, nurture and maintain long-term and mutual relationships between organizations and the strategic stakeholders. Information technology (IT) revolution of 21st century led public relations (PR) to evolve to become one among the most powerful professions. Rapid advancements in information and communications technology (ICT) sector directly impacted the public relations industry. Communication being core produce of the field, this development provided an impetus to the PR and communications activities both inside and outside the organizations (Radhe, 2015) ln their nine-year-long international survey of public relations practitioners Wright and Hinson (2013) examined the impact blogs and other social media are having on public relations practice. Their findings show these new media are dramatically changing the face of public relations practice. Results indicate blogs and social media have enhanced what happens in public relations and that social media and traditional mainstream media complement each other. The study also finds the emergence of blogs and social media have changed the way their organisations communicate, especially to external audience. Their findings suggest social media complement traditional news media, and that blogs and social media influence coverage in traditional news media. The study reports blogs and social media have made communications more instantaneous by encouraging organisations to respond more quickly to criticism.

The Pew Research Center (2013) regularly does research on Americans sources of news information. Understandably, this research has found most people blend online and traditional sources in their search for information about what's going on in the nation and the world. The most recent study of this nature found 50 percent of Americans consider the internet to be a major source for national and international news. Television (69%) remains the most frequently used news source in the U.S. with newspapers (28%) and radio (23%) falling farther and farther behind each

year. These 2013 results represent a big change from earlier Pew Studies. In 2001, 45 percent said newspapers were their top source for news with just 13 percent saying the internet (Pew,2013).

The management of information flow between an organisation and its internal and external publics is within the purview of the public relations practitioner (Igben and Ugbome, 2022). This job has been made easier with the advent of social media. PR practitioners work with the media to manage their organisation's PR activities. Most PR practitioners have taken advantage of the various opportunities offered by the social media to improve their professional practices in order to build strong global reputation for their organisations creative ways. Although, there are some public relations practitioners who are yet to consider digital media as the best option to sell their organisation to the world for some reason. At best, they use social media for their personal interactions, leaving their organisations' publics at the mercy of rumour mongers and unprofessional media practitioners in the social space (Orji-Egwu, et al, 2019).

Technology have revolutionized virtually all aspects of modern life. This includes: agriculture, commerce, dating, education, health, mass media, publishing, science, transportation, and war. In the same vain, the internet has changed practically all area of modern life due to the way information is shared and retrieved, its connectivity and pervasiveness, making most of private and public interactions quick and convenient(Kent,2014). Internet and website technology add several factors to the role of PR. It allows instant information dissemination, and that information can be hard to control. Business websites allow for a PR platform that helps regain some of the control lost by the immediacy of internet communication (Frenz, n.d)

 According to Ogbu (2019), the social media despite its many complexities, present a viable opportunity for the extension of public relations practice in Nigeria. He added that public relations practitioners who are desirous of tilting online discussions and traffic in favour of their organisations must learn how to efficiently use social media platforms in reaching their publics. The new technology has created ways for swift transfer of information and this has encouraged PR practitioners to adopt new methods of information dissemination through the innovative and creative ways they attend to issues (El-Nafaty, 2022)
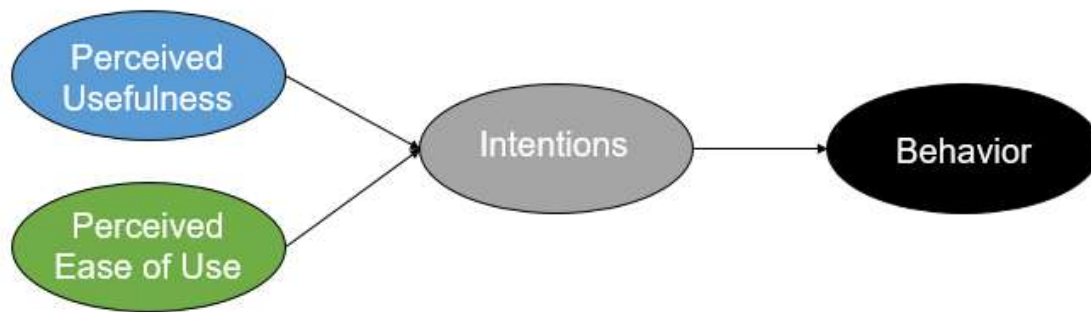
Technology Acceptance Model
The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989) evolved from the Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behavior. From the onset of this theory, the Technology Acceptance Model goal was to give an explanation of the determinants of computer acceptance that can explain users' behaviour across a wide range of end-user computing technologies and user populations, while at the same time being both parsimonious and theoretically justified (Davis et al. 1989). The Technology Acceptance Model usage has now been stretched to include various technologies beyond computers to include the use of telemedicine services, phone apps digital technologies for teachers and e-learning platforms for students

(Scherer, Siddiq, & Tondeur, 2019, Min, So, & Jeong, 2019, Kamal, Shafiq, & Kakria, 2020, Sukendro et al., 2020)

Technology Acceptance Model offers to answer the question of why do people accept or reject information technology? Davis (1985) investigation revealed that among the many variables that may influence the acceptance or rejection of information technology there are: First, people tend to use or not an application to the extent they believe will help them to perform their job better. Second, even if potential users believed a given application is useful, they may, at the same time, believed that the system is too hard to use and that the performance benefits of the usage are outweighed by the effort of using the application Davis (1985). This made him to theorize that people accept new technology according to their perception of its usefulness and their perception on its ease of use.

The Technology Acceptance Model is depicted below:

Explaining further, (Burgess &Worthington,2021) emphasized the position of Technology Acceptance Model that actual technology use is linked directly by the individual's plan to use the technology. An increase in the user's decision to use the technology increases the likelihood of actually using the technology in this instance, social media. According to them, the technology acceptance model proposes that perceived ease of use and usefulness of a technological tool determines the extent of the consumer's acceptance. Additionally, the Technology Acceptance Model anticipated that these intentions are linked to:
(1) an individual's perceived usefulness of the technology and

 (2) an individual's perceived ease of use of the technology.

 Perceived usefulness is the extent to which an individual has the confidence that usage of a specific technology would be useful. An individual's perceived usefulness of a specific technology increases his desires to use the technology.

Perceived ease of use is the extent to which an individual has confidence that usage of a specific technology especially social media would be stress free. An individual's perceived ease of use of a specific technology increases his desires to use the technology.

The advent of social media has made public relations scholars to examine the potential of social media in enhancing mutual coexistence between organisations and their strategic publics, particularly through usefulness and ease of use. According to (Olannye-Okonofua and Oji, 2023), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is generally accepted and used to make clear the connection between the perceptions and the usage of social media information exchange, in this case, the public relations practitioner and its publics. This is because how easy it is to use any technology and the level of its usefulness will determine the likelihood of its usage by public relations professionals (Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh, 2021)

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work was to explore the influence of social media in public relations communication. Public relations practitioners in Nigeria were using the traditional public relations tools until the advent of the internet. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in relation to public relations practitioners' adoption of social media in carrying out their public relations functions has improved PR practices in Nigeria. The decision to use the social media by the practitioner in PR communication function is linked to how easy to use the technology. The usefulness of the technology particularly social media is also a deciding factor for the PR practitioner in his decision to use or not to use the technology social media.

Recommendations

1.Based on this, private organisations and public institutions should organize sensitization to practitioners on the importance of social media use in PR communications.

2.It is also recommended that public relations practitioners in Nigeria should embrace technology more in their PR communication in order to more effectively reach their publics. This will enhance their practices.

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