

## Social Media Tools and Public Relations Practice of Select Banks in Akwa Ibom State

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*Abstract— This study investigated the application of social media in public relations practices of select banks – UBA and First Bank Plc., in Uyo metropolis with the objectives to: investigate the use of social media platforms or tools for public relations practices in UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, Akwa Ibom State; determine how the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc., affected their public relations practices; find out the most effective social media platforms frequently used by the UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, Akwa Ibom State in their public relations practice, among others. The survey research design was used involving 394 respondents. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to present data while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient statistics was used to test the research hypotheses. The study found among others that the select banks – UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo used social media platforms for public relations practice, there was mutually beneficial relationship between the banks and their publics via the social media channels used for public relations practice. However, the relationship was not significant. UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo used social media for public relations activities such as image making, customer relationship, etc., but there was no significant relationship between the successes of the public relations activities and the social media channels used by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, for public relations practice. It is concluded from the study that social media platforms facilitated and served as catalyst for mutually beneficial relationship between UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo and their publics. The study recommends among others, that the UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo should intensify the use of social media channels as globalisation, technological advancement and the explosion of web based, Internet powered communication have introduced a radical change to how the world works in all spheres as well as how issues concerning human relationships, business and communication are viewed.*

**Keywords:** Social Media; Public Relations; Banks (UBA & First Bank Plc.); Customer Relationship.

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## INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing an information technology revolution that has fundamentally changed many aspects of human life. Interestingly, most organisations which have embraced these new media technologies have found that the processing, transmitting, storing, retrieving, and use of information in their organisations have become dynamic, simultaneous, quick, and all-embracing (Okiyi and Eteng-Martins, 2014; Oke, Udoudo and Iwok 2018). According to Philip (2015), the advent of the Internet has tremendously revolutionised our world and the pace of the transformation is becoming increasingly difficult to manage, especially for media and communication-based functions. Not surprising, the rapidity of the changes has become more impactful in the practice of public relations.

Public Relations is described as the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics (Duru, et al., 2022; Usendok, et al., 2022; Uto, et al., 2024). It deals with the building of a robust and long-lasting mutual relationship between the public and an organisation. To establish and maintain this mutual relationship in this new digital age involves the use of various communication platforms which include the new media of Internet, websites, social networks - *Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Myspace, Instagram, Pinterest, Email, GSM, Zoom*, among others. Public relations practitioners have adopted the use of these social media to sustain the goodwill of an organisation as against the use of only traditional media such as newspaper, radio and television which were the earliest forms of media (Wang, 2015).

However, with the emergence of social media, researchers and specialists have argued its influence on public relations (PR) practice; some believe that the complexities have so intensified that the public relations profession is becoming dead or obsolete while others postulate that social media actually facilitate and serve as a catalyst for public relations activities (Philip, 2015; Ogbu, 2019). The prevalent use of social media has changed the fundamentals of public relations strategies (Komodromos, 2014; Ota, et al., 2022) and has the potential to create room for various opportunities for public relations practitioners to communicate with its target audience while adopting and integrating technological advances into the public relations process (Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton and Sweetser, 2010).

It is stated in the literature that organisations around the world utilise social media as a tool for marketing and public relations campaigns (Elison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Ahamefule, 2018). In recent time, the race for the attention of the public in the banking sector has increased drastically. The advancement of digital technology has made competition fiercer, leaving banks that do not embrace this technological transformation to be at a disadvantage in the highly competitive banking industry. Social media have made things easy as well as difficult for many businesses in Nigeria.

The use of social media has opened opportunities for businesses to leverage on and engaged with its audience. The Internet and other social networks are used by an organisation to reach the organisation's goals to sell products, provide services or

merely to inform the organisation's customers about important issues with a view to creating mutual understanding. It is an avenue for employees to communicate with the organisation's publics conveniently. The use of social media also provides ease of access and interactive ability which enable interaction between an organisation and its customers. The continuous advancement in social media channels makes it necessary to understand their use for customer relations practice in Banks in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The advent of the social media has reshaped the communication patterns from face-to-face interactions to social interactions. Today's conversations are now in the forms of likes, dislikes, tweets, shares, tags, posts, among others. The continuous use of these sites is bound to affect their purchase choices. The use of these sites in marketing is of great value to companies' managers and researchers. Companies are continually on a lookout for engaging with customers by utilising social media in the form of promotion and augmentation of the buying behaviour, leading to two-way communication as well as enabling information processing.

Also, the adoption of social media has seen an expeditious rise due to the growing use of the Internet, and marketers are making an attempt to reach consumers by commercialising their content, especially on social media sites (Natarajan, Balarkinshanan, Arasu, and Manickavasagam, 2015; Okoko & Ahamefule, 2023a). The social media channels contribute to improve company performance (Nunez-Zabaleta, 2019). They permit users to connect with networks of individuals through online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Pinterest, (Lee, Kim, and Chung, 2015). Most bank customers in the world have a social network account (Suvarna and Banerjee, 2014), making it necessary for the financial industry to intensify integration of social media with bank services. For enhancing its marketing performance and brand image, firms including banks are thoroughly adopting these integrative practices.

Generally, the rapid-paced evolution of social media makes a constant update of research findings essential to deliver the latest and most relevant insights about the use of this now ubiquitous media type in public relations. However, there is a paucity of specific research on social media use in public relations practice by banks in Nigeria particularly in Akwa Ibom State. More so, the literature on the use of social media for banks is focused on specific aspects or processes in relation to bank activities, especially the marketing process. Only a few studies consider the interaction of banks with their customers (Parusheva, 2017; Bohlin, Shaikh and Hanafizadeh, 2018; Okoko & Ahamefule, 2023b). Therefore, the major question that this study attempts to answer is: How do banks in Akwa Ibom State, use the social media platforms in the practice of public relations?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study was to investigate the effect of social media use by UBA and First bank on public relations practices. The specific objectives were to:

- i identify the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, in their public relations practices;
- ii determine how the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc., affected their public relations practices
- iii find out the frequently used social media platform(s) by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, that is most effective in their public relations practices.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study

- i. What are the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo in their public relations practices?
- ii. To what extent has the use of the social media platforms by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo affected their public relations practices?
- iii. Which of the frequently used social media platform(s) by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo is most effective in their public relations practices?

## HYPOTHESIS

**H<sub>01</sub>:** The successes of the public relations activities of UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo is not significantly related to the social media platforms used for the activities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media and Public Relations

The integration of social media into public relations has expanded the ways organisations communicate with their audiences, enhancing reputation management through new technology-enabled channels. Breakenridge (2012) highlights that the convergence of social media and public relations allows communication to unite with technology, enabling PR professionals to access and manage consumer opinions on platforms like blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites (Carrabis et al., 2008). This digital shift has broadened the scope of PR, allowing for transparent interactions where instant feedback is possible, as noted by Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antni (2015) and affirmed by Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012). Social media facilitates deeper engagement, providing organisations with tools to enhance customer relationships and immediately address issues (Mayes, 2011; Duke, et al., 2024).

As businesses shift from one-way communication to interactive dialogues with their audiences, social media has revolutionised PR, focusing on building relationships through genuine exchanges (Merrill et al., 2011; ). This shift aligns with PR's goal of fostering mutual understanding and credibility with the public. Social media also enables PR practitioners to gather critical data to maintain relationships and respond to customer needs. Financial institutions, for example, are leveraging Web 2.0 tools like

podcasts and widgets to improve customer service and satisfaction, building meaningful connections with customers that strengthen trust and loyalty (Finsights, 2011). As the digital landscape continues to evolve, PR professionals must adapt to maintain relevance and competitive advantage in this dynamic environment.

## **BANKS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media has fundamentally transformed communication in the banking industry, fostering transparency and providing a platform for banks to engage directly with customers. Albu and Whmeier (2014) emphasise the need for clear and transparent communication in PR activities to build trust, especially in light of the “fake news” phenomenon (Rutenberg, 2016; Duke & Odibu, 2022). PR practitioners must be adept at truthful communication across various platforms, ensuring messages are easily understood (Rawlins, 2008) while addressing the impact of misinformation on audience trust. As highlighted by Jeong (2019), social media platforms have implemented measures to mitigate fake news, requiring PR experts to focus on creating clear, authentic messaging.

Banks in Nigeria, such as GTBank and Zenith Bank, have embraced social media to boost brand awareness, promote services, and foster customer engagement, with GTBank pioneering social banking on Facebook, allowing account holders to conduct transactions (The Financial Brand, 2020). These banks use social media channels, including Instagram and Twitter, to remain competitive, build brand loyalty, and provide customer service, as detailed by Aliyu and Ali-Gombe (2016). Banks worldwide have adopted similar strategies, with innovative applications like Deniz Bank’s Facebook banking service, illustrating the industry’s shift toward digital engagement. Social media’s role in the banking sector continues to grow as it becomes essential for banks to interact with customers, manage brand reputation, and maintain a competitive edge through digital connectivity.

## **REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

Ogbu (2019) explored the transformative impact of the information age on public relations (PR) in Nigeria, emphasising that advancements in digital media technology have significantly influenced business, politics, and social relations. The findings of this study indicate that although digital evolution is ongoing, its effect has been profound and multifaceted, offering both opportunities and challenges to PR practices. With rapid changes in how information is disseminated, PR professionals face the dual challenge of leveraging digital media’s expansive reach while addressing issues that arise, such as managing real-time feedback and mitigating misinformation. This dynamic environment requires PR practitioners to adapt continually to stay effective and relevant in the field. The study highlights the importance of strategic digital adaptation in order to optimise the benefits of new media technology while minimising the associated risks that can undermine PR objectives.

Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antwi (2015) investigated the use of Facebook as a PR tool within the Ghanaian financial services industry, focusing on how organisations leverage this platform to build relationships with current and potential customers. Employing a mixed-method approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data analysis, their findings reveal that while Facebook is a common PR tool, communication remains predominantly one-way. This limited interactivity has led to weaker relationships between organisations and their audiences, as the companies generally broadcast messages without fostering meaningful engagement. The study highlights a significant gap in two-way communication, which is essential for building stronger connections with the public. Organisations are thus encouraged to enhance interactivity on platforms like Facebook to reinforce their relationships with customers and to shift from merely broadcasting information to engaging more directly with their audiences.

Mahboub (2018) examined the effect of social media use on the performance of banks in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries, finding that social media positively influences both financial and non-financial aspects of performance. Specifically, the research demonstrated that the integration of social media contributes to improvements in profitability, growth, and environmental performance, which reflects social media's ability to enhance customer engagement and brand visibility. The study suggests that banks in the MENA region benefit from social media adoption by not only reaching wider audiences but also strengthening their market presence and sustainability initiatives. As social media becomes increasingly central to customer interaction, banks in this region are poised to further their operational success by harnessing digital platforms to improve service quality and foster customer loyalty.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technological Determinism Theory, proposed by Thorsten Veblen and later expanded by Marshall McLuhan, posits that technology shapes the culture and trajectory of society. McLuhan's concept, "The Medium is the Message," encapsulates the idea that new technologies fundamentally alter human interaction, perception, and societal structure (Duke, 2017; Ukonu, Ani, and Ndubisi, 2013; Griffin, 2000). This theory is particularly relevant to public relations, as it underscores how technology-driven communication fosters global connectivity and enables PR practitioners to establish mutual understanding between organisations and their publics through digital platforms.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Elihu Katz in the 1970s, analyses how individuals use media to fulfil social and psychological needs, creating patterns of media engagement that lead to satisfaction (Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017; Katz et al., 1973). In the context of social media, UGT has been widely applied to understand how users' needs and expectations drive their interactions with content, particularly within PR, where it is useful in examining how audiences engage with social media content shared by organisations (Ruggiero, 2000;

Duke, 2023). This theory is thus relevant in evaluating the impact of social media on PR practices, especially for banks aiming to engage their audience in Uyo.

Social Construction Theory, introduced by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, suggests that individuals and organisations form and interpret social reality through interactions, creating shared meanings that are institutionalised over time. This theory posits that reality is subjective, shaped by individuals' perceptions and interactions within social systems (Momoh, 2015). Applied to social media, the theory views digital platforms as spaces where people and organisations construct meaning and reality through shared messages and interactions, allowing target audiences to interpret and create their own understanding from these exchanges.

Impression Management Theory, introduced by Erving Goffman in 1959, likens individuals and organisations to actors on a stage, deliberately shaping impressions to align with their goals. Organisations engage with their publics to project a controlled image that reflects their objectives, striving to influence how they are perceived (Momoh, 2015). IMT aligns with Social Construction Theory's emphasis on subjective reality, suggesting that organisations' strategic image creation through social media communications ultimately becomes the audience's perceived reality, reinforcing the importance of managed public impressions in PR practices.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to explore issues related to human opinions, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, perceptions, and feelings. Two respondent groups comprised the population: staff of selected banks in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, specifically United Bank for Africa (UBA) and First Bank of Nigeria Plc, totalling 80 staff members across both banks, and bank customers from UBA's branches at Abak Road, Nwaniba Road, and Udoudoma (58,210 customers) and First Bank's branches at Aka Road, Oron Road, and Udoudoma (57,122 customers), resulting in a total study population of 115,412. A sample size of 400 was determined using Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2007) model at a 95% confidence level. Proportionate sampling was applied to randomly select respondents from both banks' branches in Uyo, maintaining population proportions, with UBA representing 51% (205 respondents) and First Bank 49% (195 respondents). A 12-item questionnaire served as the data collection instrument. Reliability was assessed via the test-retest method, computing correlation coefficients by measuring the same group of 20 respondents (from a different Uyo-based bank) twice, with a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis yielding a 0.75 reliability coefficient, indicating internal consistency. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, including frequency tables, percentages, and a weighted mean score with a criterion of 2.50, presented in tables for clarity and ease of interpretation.

## DATA PRESENTATION

This segment of data presentation and analysis deals with responses obtained from 400 valid respondents. Out of the 400 administered, 394 were returned and valid for analysis. This represents 98% return rate as against 2% non-return rate which was very minimal. The data obtained in response to the items in section B of the questionnaire were presented in tables as follows:

- (i) **United Bank for Africa and First Bank, Uyo used the following social media channels/platforms to communicate practice public relations**

The following data were obtained in response to the social media channels/platforms used by UBA and First Bank, Uyo to practice public relations.

**Table 1.2: Social Media Platforms used by UBA and First Bank, Uyo to Practice PR**

Channels	SA	A	SD	D	Total	WMS	Remarks
Internet	167	126	44	57	1191	3.02	Accepted
Website blogs (web blogs)	146	176	47	25	1231	3.12	Accepted
Vlogs (video blogs)	56	67	180	91	879	2.22	Rejected
Visual and audio newscasts	78	191	62	63	1072	2.72	Accepted
RSS news feeds	160	109	65	60	1157	2.93	Accepted
Facebook	168	114	34	78	1160	2.94	Accepted
Twitter	146	112	70	44	1104	2.80	Accepted
You Tube	109	87	99	99	994	2.52	Accepted
Instagram	118	77	99	100	1001	2.54	Accepted
WhatsApp	135	87	93	79	1066	2.70	Accepted
Pinterest	12	38	190	154	696	1.76	Rejected
Snapchat	28	80	189	177	907	2.30	Rejected
LinkedIn	116	36	140	102	954	2.42	Rejected
All	17	19	164	194	547	1.64	Rejected
<b>Total mean score</b>						<b>2.54</b>	<b>Positive</b>

From the data presented in Table 1.2, the social media channels/platforms of communication used by UBA and First Bank Plc, Uyo, for public relations practice were the Internet, Website blogs (web blogs), Visual and audio newscasts, Really Simple Syndication Web Updates (RSS news feeds), Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This is based on the weighted mean scores obtained by the items that examined the use of these channels for the practice of public relations in the select banks. The data presented in the Table indicate that Internet (3.02), Websites blog (3.12), Visual and audio newscast (2.72), RSS news feed (2.93), Facebook (2.94), Twitter (2.80), You Tube (2.52), WhatsApp (2.70) and Instagram (2.54) were mostly utilised by UBA and First Bank Plc, Uyo in the practice of its public relations. Moreover, the overall



weighted mean score of 2.54, also suggest a positive result as regards the use of social media in the public relations practice of the select banks.

(ii) **Extent of social media use by UBA and First Bank to practice public relations**

The following data were obtained in response to the respondents' knowledge of the extent of social media use in the practice of public relations.

**Table 1.3: Extent to which the use of Social Media Platforms by UBA and First Bank Plc, Uyo, Affected their Public Relations Practices**

<b>Channels</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>WMS</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Very great extent in real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships	186	149	35	24	1285	3.26	Accepted
Great extent in real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships	170	157	33	34	1251	3.17	Accepted
Little extent in real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships	50	120	137	87	921	2.33	Rejected
Very little extent in real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships	17	50	180	147	725	1.84	Rejected
Can't say	33	47	140	174	760	1.92	Rejected
<b>Total mean score</b>						<b>2.50</b>	<b>Positive</b>

The data presented in Table 1.3, indicate that 3.26 of the respondents admitted that to a very great extent social media platforms/channels used by UBA and First Bank Plc, Uyo, affected their public relations practices in the area of real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships. Out of the 394 respondents, 3.17 noted that to a great extent, social media platforms used affected the practice of public relations in UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo in the area of real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships. However, 2.33 of the respondents claimed that social media used have affected the public relations practice

to a little extent in the listed areas while 1.92 of the respondents could not say. The overall positive weighted mean score of 2.50 implied that UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo, social media use to a great extent affected their public relations practices.

**(iii) The group of social media that are the most effective platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc to practice public relations.**

The respondents were asked in item 9 on the questionnaire to indicate the group of social media which they considered to be the most effective platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc in their public relations practice. The following data were obtained.

**Table 1.4: Group of Frequently used Social Media Platforms by UBA and First Bank, Uyo that are effective in their Public Relations Practices**

Channels	SA	A	SD	D	Total	WMS	Remarks
Internet, website blogs, video blogs, visual and audio newscast	169	146	10	69	1203	3.05	Rejected
Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, You tube	179	130	15	70	1206	3.06	Accepted
Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkdIn, Tik Tok	60	137	127	70	975	2.47	Rejected
<b>Total mean score</b>						<b>2.86</b>	<b>Positive</b>

As presented in Table 1.4, the majority of the respondents with the weighted mean score of 3.06 indicated that the group of social media channels/platforms considered the most effective platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo, to practice public relations were Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and You Tube. This was followed by Internet, Website blogs, Video blogs, Visual and audio newscast with 3.05 weighted mean score. The overall positive weighted mean score of 2.86 suggests that on average the respondents considered the social media platforms listed in the second group were the most effective platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo, in their public relations practices.

## TEST OF HYPOTHESES

### Hypothesis Two:

**H0<sub>2</sub>: The successes of the public relations activities of UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, Akwa Ibom State is not significantly related to the social media channels used for the activities.**

To test this hypothesis, data on the success of public relations activities (x) and social media channels (y) were drawn from tables 4.7 and 4.2, respectively. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) statistics at 0.05% level of significance with 5 degree of freedom was used. The results for the distribution and computation values are presented in appendix III (b).

**Table 1.10: Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistical Computation for Hypothesis II**

X	Y	X <sup>2</sup>	Y <sup>2</sup>	XY
1179	1191	1390041	1418481	1404189
1132	1231	1281424	1515361	1393492
1171	879	1371241	772641	1029309
1123	1072	1261129	1149184	1203856
745	1157	555025	1338649	861965
1130	1160	1276900	1345600	1310800
1127	1104	1270129	1218816	1244208
<b>7607</b>	<b>7794</b>	<b>8405889</b>	<b>8758732</b>	<b>7585854</b>

$$r = \frac{7(7585854) - (7607)(7794)}{\sqrt{[7(8405889) - (7607)^2][7(8758732) - (7794)^2]}}$$

$$r = \frac{53100978 - 59288958}{\sqrt{[(8405889 - 57866449)] [61311159 - 60746436]}}$$

$$r = \frac{6187980}{\sqrt{(49460560)(564723)}}$$

$$r = \frac{6187980}{\sqrt{27931515824880}}$$

$$r = \frac{6187980}{5285027.5141}$$

$$r = 1.1708$$

$$r = 1.171$$

**Decision Rule:** Reject the tested Null hypothesis if the calculated value of 1.171 is greater than the critical value of 2.776 and accept the stated alternate hypothesis. The calculated value is less than the critical value at 0.05% level of significance with 5 degree of freedom. Hence, the Null is accepted and the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the successes of the public relations activities of the select banks in Akwa Ibom State is significantly related to the social media channels use for the activities is rejected.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study in relations to the research questions are discussed in this section.

### **Research Question One: What are the social media channels used by the select Banks in Akwa Ibom State for public relations practice?**

The study found that UBA and First Bank Plc. in Uyo used a variety of social media channels in their public relations practices. Data presented in Table 1.2 showed that both banks employed communication channels such as the Internet, website blogs, video blogs (vlogs), visual and audio newscasts, RSS news feeds, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Snapchat, and LinkedIn. Analysis indicated that the most frequently used platforms included the Internet (3.02), website blogs (3.12), visual and audio newscasts (2.72), RSS news feeds (2.93), Facebook (2.94), Twitter (2.80), YouTube (2.52), WhatsApp (2.70), and Instagram (2.54), with an overall weighted mean score of 2.54. This score suggests a positive result regarding the banks' use of social media for public relations. Based on this weighted mean score, it was inferred that UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo leveraged a substantial number of social media channels in their public relations practices. This result aligns with studies by Parusheva (2017) and Bohlin, Shaikh, and Hanafizadeh (2018), which underscore how banks interact with customers through multiple social media channels. Social media has evolved into a critical platform for business growth, enabling companies, including banks, to establish and maintain customer relationships (Chen, Beaudoin, & Hong, 2016; Parusheva, 2019). As past research indicates, with more than 89% of global bank customers active on social media (Suvarna & Banerjee, 2014), the financial sector increasingly integrates these platforms to stay competitive.

This result is consistent with the Financial Brand (2020) report, which lists Nigerian banks like Zenith, Guarantee Trust, Access, First Bank, Stanbic IBTC, UBA, and others among the top one hundred banks effectively using social media. Social media enhances brand awareness, self-service options, and public relations campaigns for banks (He et al., 2013). It fosters a community where customers can share their opinions and gain widespread attention, helping banks to detect service gaps, improve customer interactions, and implement service guidelines for sustainable growth (Gemar & Jimenez-Quintero, 2015). Further supporting these findings, Barnes (2002) notes that mobile media aid customer acquisition with their immediacy and accessibility, while Henning-Thurau et al. (2010) highlight social media's role in encouraging online transactions. Such platforms allow companies to gather data and apply collaborative filtering techniques that utilise "swarm intelligence." RSS feeds, for instance, automatically inform participants, enabling companies to monitor consumer interest trends for marketing. As suggested by Dickinger et al. (2004), the absence of physical cues in virtual spaces heightens the importance of brand identity, reinforcing the Technological Determinism Theory. This theory asserts that the rise of social media has transformed communication patterns between organisations and customers, making interactions faster, easier, and more reliable.

**Research Question Two: To what extent has the use of social media platforms by UBA and First Bank Plc., affected their public relations practices?**

The study found that the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo, to a great extent affected their public relations practices in the area of real-time communication, seamless interactions, sharing information, democratisation of voices and enhancing relationships. This conclusion is based on the analysis of the data as presented in Table 1.3. From the analysis, respondents with a weighted mean score of 3.26 admitted that to a very great extent social media channels/platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo affected the public relations practices of the banks in the aforementioned dimensions. Respondents with 3.17 weighted mean score noted that to a great extent social media platform affected the practice of public relations in UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo in the area earlier listed. However, respondents who received 2.33 weighted mean score claimed that social media used affected the practice in the dimension stated, to a little extent while 1.92 of the respondents had nothing to say regarding the issue. The overall positive weighted mean score of 2.50 implied that the social media platforms used by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo, on average affected their public relations practices in the dimensions identified.

This finding aligns with the assertion that public relations has been beautified and taken to a new dimension in recent years with the emergence of the Internet and social media channels. Technological advances have made communication with organisation and its public easier (Carton, 2009). As Breakenridge (2012, p.1) points out “when social media meets public relations, communication unites with technology.” Kim and Johnson (2011) citing Solis and Breakenridge (2009) observe that Web 2.0 and social media platforms have broadened the parameter of communication and has granted public relations executives various opportunities for reaching the publics.

This finding also underscores Carrabis et al., (2008) observation that public relations practices have become more transparent in this digital era because communication is handled on the Internet where everyone has democratic access (Andoh-Quainoo and Annor-Antni, 2015). This, as Breakenridge (2012) notes has been made possible with the rise of social media. Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) affirm that the social media have given organisations the opportunity of engaging their stakeholders in instantaneous communication and exchange of information. Social media have become an imperative public relations and marketing tool for businesses to use in their practices (Mayes, 2011) because they enable businesses to engage with their target audience at a deeper level with instant feedback.

**Which of the frequently used social media platform(s) by UBA and First Bank Plc., Uyo is most effective in their public relations practices?**

The study’s analysis of the third research question identified that UBA and First Bank Plc. in Uyo primarily utilised Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube as their most effective social media platforms for public relations, with these platforms in Group 2 receiving a weighted mean score of 3.06. Platforms such as

Internet blogs, video blogs, and visual and audio newscasts were also significantly used, garnering a score of 3.05, followed by platforms like Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and TikTok. Overall, a weighted mean score of 2.86 indicated respondents' agreement that the platforms in the first and second groups were frequently and effectively employed by the banks for public relations efforts. This result aligns with The Financial Brand (2020), which identified eleven Nigerian banks, including UBA and First Bank, among the top hundred globally that effectively use social media, particularly Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, in English-speaking regions.

Findings further reinforce previous studies showing Facebook's popularity among businesses due to its low-cost targeting capabilities via "workplace targeting," which allows for specific audience targeting based on demographics (Bell, 2017). With social media, public relations practitioners can now directly publish content via blogs and social networks rather than relying solely on traditional media (Gordon, 2010). Additionally, platforms like Instagram, with features such as Stories and IGTV, support visual content that raises brand awareness and enhances user engagement (Thakur, 2017). YouTube's evolution from a user-generated content site to a mainstream media platform provides a convergence of TV and internet services, offering short-form video content and long-form YouTube TV, which reaches a substantial adult audience (Spangler, 2019). Twitter's capability for real-time updates and wide media support makes it ideal for announcements, campaign research, and public engagement, while WhatsApp's global reach supports multimedia communication, further aiding public relations professionals in customer engagement and brand-following (Jasra, 2010).

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the analysis, discussion and interpretation of data, the study has shown the following significant findings:

- i. UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo used social media channels for public relations. Out of the array of social media the bank deployed mostly Internet (3.02), Websites blogs (3.12), WhatsApp (2.70), Facebook (2.94), RSS news feeds (2.93, Visual and Audio cast (2.72) and Twitter (2.80) for public relations practice.
- ii. Social media channels of communication were used to a large extent by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo as tools for the practice of public relations. The data (2.50) obtained on the extent of social media use by the select banks for the practice of public relations confirmed this result.
- iii. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and You Tube, followed by Internet, Website blogs, Video blogs, Visual and audio newscast were the most effective social media platforms for the practice of public relations by UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo used social media channels for public relations practice and to a great extent.

Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and You Tube, followed by Internet, Website blogs, Video blogs, Visual and audio newscast were the most effective social media platforms for the practice of public relations by the select banks in Uyo. The banks and their publics have mutually beneficial relationship following the use of social media for public relations practice. However, the result of the hypothesis tested to ascertain this showed no significant correlation. UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo used social media channels for these public relations activities: image making, media relations, customer information, customer relationship management and external relations. However, the result of the tested hypothesis showed no significant relationship between the successes of the public relations activities and the social media channels used by the select banks – UBA and First Bank Plc. Uyo for public relations practice. There are some challenges associated with the use of social media channels to practice public relations. They include: phishing (online scam), low penetration/poor Internet facility, busy/lack of signal, hacking of account, operational difficulties and distortions of website. Social media have influenced, facilitated and served as catalyst for public relations activities of the select banks.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of the study, these recommendations are proffered:

- i. Banks should intensify the usage of the channels as globalisation, technological advancement and the explosion of web based, Internet powered communication have introduced a radical change to how the world works in all spheres.
- ii. Banks should be consistent in their usage of these platforms to meet the public relations activities of their firms, especially with regard to communicating with its customers.
- iii. Banks should identify emerging channels and also integrate them in their public relations practice.

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