

## **An Appraisal of Social Media Use among PR Practitioners in Rivers State: A Synopsis**

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**Abstract:** *The burgeoning posture of the social media makes it a preferred media for information dissemination by individuals and organization, this study, therefore sought to evaluate the extent public relation practitioners in Rivers State are making the most of the social media in building organizational image and goodwill with their publics. The study adopted the survey research method with the Technological Determinism Theory and the Uses and Gratification Theory as its theoretical anchor. The study population comprised 1,052 registered members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relation Rivers State. Using the Check market online sample size calculator, a sample size of 282 was used for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for the study. Data were generated with the use of the questionnaire and analyzed using frequency distribution tables, percentages and weighted mean score. Finding revealed that PR practitioners' use of the social media in organizations in Rivers State is low (103 or 36.5%). Yet, the finding confirms that social media use by organizations can improve their image and publics' goodwill to a high extent (113 or 40.1%). Conversely, finding showed that most challenging in the use of the social media by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State is their aversion for the media (119). The study concluded that the exigency of meeting up the communication and information demands of organizations' publics' makes the use of the social media by PR practitioners incumbent. It recommended that organizations sub create a sub public relation unit, i.e e-public relations which will be saddled with managing all its social media platforms; the need for finding of the PR department to meet up the sustenance of social media presence and the need for promptness on feedback on issues raised by the public's on social media so as to bridge the communication gap.*

**Key words:** *Public relations, social media, Publics, appraisal, organizations.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The burgeoning and seeming indispensable posture of the social media are rubbing off on virtually every profession. The public relations profession is not left out in this frenzy. As society evolves, there is a growing need to not only reach prospective clients and public, but to do that with the right and perhaps most effective media.

Eventually, the population of citizens is increasing by the day. This can be attributed to the growing number of persons who now access the internet. Similarly, development in technology in recent times, is expanding the frontiers of communication. The 21<sup>st</sup> century had brought with it the convergence of the traditional media; print, radio and television on the internet. Interestingly, this has metamorphosed to new internet based media forms (Iwokwagh & Okworo, 2012).

Moreso, the business of public relations is to strife towards cautiously and deliberately ensuring that the organization's image is projected in a manner that will only create the needed positive image between it and its publics-both internal and external. In doing this, communication remains the single most essential component. While there are several channels available to the PR professional in reaching organizations' publics, Ikpe & Olise (2010) argue that the "most prominent and common is the media" (p. 59). That was then, today, the social media is fast becoming the communication destination of choice for many PR professionals who desire to reach their publics at a convenient, cheap and more interactive manner too.

Interestingly, the social media appear to be making the job of the public relations professional a lot easier or so it seems. Prior to this time, PR professional will have to spend much budgeting for press releases, media tours, exhibition, work 'shops, among others. All of these could be conveniently done using the social media. The attractiveness of these media to reach out to organizations' publics is the growing number of person who now uses them as their major source of information. Nearly ninety percent (if not more) of all online or Internet users

use social media in one way or the other (Kietzmann & Kistophers, 2011; Dolwick, 2009, cited in Chukwu & Ugoms, 2004).

This study therefore seeks to appraise social media usage PR practitioners in Rivers State, with a view to determining the extent they are making the most of the latent potential of the media in reaching their publics and at the same time enhancing organizational image and goodwill.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

It is seemingly difficult for organizations to rise beyond the public's goodwill. That is why there is a continuous effort by organizations to maintain goodwill and positive image. The public relations officer is saddled with the responsibility of advising management and executing programmes to achieving that. The challenge is that despite the onerous responsibility of the PR professional, they are still seemingly relegated in some organizations. This could account for why little or no budget is voted for their operations. Data usage at a large scale by PR professionals could be expensive. If the PR professional must sustain their presence on all the social media platforms then some reasonable budget must be voted for this purpose.

However, there is also the concern of the level of application of social media by public relations practitioners in organizations in Rivers State. For organization that have public relations department, there is the likelihood that the practitioners would have risen through the ranks with a number of them aged. Chances are that these ones will continue to prefer the traditional media of communication to the social media. Moreso, there is the issue of carefully designing social media messages and campaign to reach certain demography of targets. This requires the engagement of professionals which seems to be lacking in the industry. The question therefore, is: are public relations practitioners making the most of the much potential of the social media in reaching its publics in Rivers State?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The followings are the objectives of this study:

1. Examine the level of social media usage by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State.
2. Evaluate the extent social media use by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State has helped improve organizations' image and public's goodwill.
3. Identify challenges inherent in the use of social media by public relations practitioners in organizations in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of social usage by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State?
2. To what extent has social media use by PR practitioners helped in improving organizations' image and public's goodwill?
3. What challenges are inherent in the use of social media by public relations practitioners in organization in Rivers State?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study is limited within public relation practitioners in Rivers State, it is again restricted to the social media as a communication channel used by the public relations practitioners in organizations in Rivers State.

### **Significance of the Study**

The social media is increasing the frontiers of communication and reach in the public relations professions. This study, therefore seeks to explore practical ways is maximizing the latent potential of the social media by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State.

It is also hoped that the study findings would help organizations develop and fund their PR departments and professional to be 21<sup>st</sup> century technologically compliant. Again it would have also contributed to knowledge by pushing arguments to support the need for effective technological innovations to enhance the job of the PR practitioner in organizations in Rivers State.

## **III. Literature Review**

The study is linked to the Technological Determination Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Propounded by McLuhan (1962) and cited in Adler (2006), the technological determinism (TD) theory

examines the rate and which technological development has affected human activities. Arguably, the social networking sites as technological inventions used in human communication have visible effects on the media users presently (Edogor, Jonah & Ojo, 2014). The advent of the social media has not only increased the frontiers of communication but it has also affected the ways people communicate. It would be very hard to agree that the internet has not affect the way in which people work, study and look for information or communicate with others (Bakker & Sadaba, 2009, cited in Edogor et al., 2014). Unlike the restrictions in reaching person outside the converge area of traditional media; like radio, television and newspapers, the social media can be used to reach any target audience across the globe. Prominent among the feature of the social networking sites is their accessibility, which has made human-mediated communication to be a minutes-to-minute matter. For instance, the use of mobile phones for mass dissemination of information has changed the society tremendously. With mobile phones one makes purchases, delivers emergency information and a post of other things (Asadu, 2014). Accordingly, the social media sites are enhancing the activities of the PR practitioners, making it a communication channel of choice.

The Uses and Gravitation Theory used for this study is a shift from the previously held notion that the media are powerful. Developed, in the 1960, the theory believes that it is the users of a communication medium that determine its influence by the way they use it. The theory holds that people's use of certain media of communication is borne out of the gratification they derive over time from them. The theory, in this light, sees media consumers as active. Severin & Tankard (1999) contend that "the audience is made up of individuals who demand something from the communication which they are exposed and who select those that are likely to be useful to them" (p. 53). The relevance of these theories to the study is that social media sites which are a product of Technological developments are being sued by PR Practitioners for the purpose of reaching out to their publics. Members of the public who are favourably disposed to the operations of the organizations with social media presence seize the platform to interact with them to get firsthand information.

### **Social Media and the Nigeria Experience**

Social media sites are fast gaining prominence in Nigeria. This development is not unconnected to the spate of internet penetration and affordability in Nigeria. Social media emergence began in the early days of internet when people started sharing information communication with one another (Boyd & Ellison, 2010, cited in Chukwu & Uzoms, 2014) the social media has developed to the point that it is not only inclusive in any way that people no longer remain silent spectators to the content being dished out to them. Now they could create their own content, share it with others respond to people, collaborate with them and many more (Andres & Haenlein, 2010).

There are five (5) major features that are easily identified with social media. The features are social networking and social interaction participation, the use of social providers, openness and collaboration (Oyenuga 2015, citing Toivo, 2012). Toivo (2012) cited in Oyenuga (2015) had postulated six classification of the social networking sites (Facebook, Google, MySpace, LinkedIn), media products community (YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare); blog service (word press, blogger, Twitter) information community (Wikipedia and Wikispaces). Among these, social media, social networks and micro blogs are the most popular, amounting for 22.7% of all times spent online in the United State (Eun, 2011, cited in Nyekwere, Okoro & Azubuike, 2014).

The return on investment research 2011 revealed that social networking account for one of every six minutes spent online. There are 750 million active Facebook users across the global and 31% of Facebook users are on the site multiple times every day (Nyekwere et al., 2014). Facebook was founded in 2004 and with over 600 million users and presence in over 70 countries (Carlson, 2011; Techtree News Statt, 2008, cited in Ramsaran-Fowder & Fowder, 2013).

Consequently, the internet frenzy is high in Nigeria. Estimates from the internet usage statistics according to Internet World State put Nigeria internet population for 28.9% of total internet users in a percentage population penetration of 28.4% and accounting for 28.9% of total internet users in Africa (Internet World State, 2012, cited in Ndinojuo, Ihejirika, Mbazie & Eludu, 2015). This statistic puts Nigeria as the most internet users in Africa. This is a significant leap from 1999 which saw 100 thousand internet users recorded in Nigeria (Ogunlesi, 2011, cited in Ndinojuo et al., 2015). Research by socialibakers.Com (2013) and cited in Ndinojuo et al. (2015) "estimate that Nigeria has about 5.3 million Facebook Usage" and ranked 35 among Countries of the World in Facebook usage "(p 72). The statistics is a clear pointer to how rife Nigeria is in using the Social Media, especially in traditional publicity and public relations campaigns.

### **Public Relations and Social Media Use**

The incursion made by the social media in every facet of human endeavours and contemporary business operations make them a destination of choice in communicating to organisations' publics. The new media, of which the social media is one, is becoming the preferred term for a range of media, practices that employ digital technology and the computer (and internet) in some way or another (Dewdney & Ride, 2003, cited in Melanie, 2008). Interestingly, the internet is giving public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues and engages in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues (McAllister & Taylor, 2007). Consequently, many firms in Nigeria are increasingly becoming ware of the seeming indispensability of the social media site, (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube etc.) in reaching, their publics, Tratner & Kappe (2012) cited in Chukwu & Ugoma (2014) argue that "Many firms in Nigeria also have stated plunging into using these platform" (p. 69). Infact, organizations are increasing their investments in Information Communication Technology and much more in social media campaigns. Alterian (2010) cited in Onyekwerere & Okoro (2014) did a survey revealing that "66 percent of respondents will be in social media marketing in 2010" (p. 3). Expectedly that percentage would have increased by 2018. Today, organizations are hiring Community Managers and Social media analysts and they are forming their own department (Ramsaran-Fowder & Fowder, 2013). In a number of cases these departments are structured directly under the public relations units of these organizations.

Similarly, the Social Media platform are providing public relations practitioners opportunity to reach many more publics than was previously imagine. Infact public relations through social media has become easy because a large number of potential customers (Publics) are available on the virtual networks and making connection with consumers (Publics), using Social Media is only some clicks away (Khan & Far, 2015 cited in Dii, 2018).

In recent times, there is a shift from the conventional techniques of public relation. This requires public relations practitioners to rethink how they relate to the publics in a fast, convenient and regular manner. Public relations practitioners would be aware that transcripts, reports and budgets are regularly being placed on the web, either by organizations themselves or by citizens trying to hold those organizations to account. (Stephen, 2007, cited in Melanie, 2008). Research has shown that public relations practitioners who embrace new technologies such as blogging are perceived within organizations as having more power, in that they are willing to be leaders in the industry and use new tools, to better reach larger publics (Porter, Sweetser, Trammell, Chung & Kim, 2007, cited in Melanie, 2008). The four-step process of public relations practice which comprises research, planning and programming, action and communication and evaluation have been boasting by the application of the social media platforms in its practice. What has undergone serious changes is the impact on the speed conciseness and wealth of access the practitioners enjoy in each step of the process mentioned above. This is possible only because of the advances taking place in the Information and Communication fields. (Internet/Social Media) which have opened vistas and opportunities in channeling messages in ways unimaginable (Black, 1991).

### **Challenges of Social Media by PR Practitioners in Nigeria**

Inspite of the fact that the social media sites are fast become favourite communication channels to reaching out to organizations 'publics, a number of challenges are inherent in its use by public relations practitioners in Nigeria. Arguably, the primary intent of the designers of most social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter among others, is for the purpose of social interaction. That is why the core activities consumers (Publics) engage in on social media are converse, share, post, tag, upload, content, comment, be entertained and so on. (Tuten & Solomon, 2004). However, there in the onerous challenges of launching a PR programme targeted at getting the attention of these publics using the social media. So some measure of creativity is required to getting the publics attention when using the social media. Again some level of sophistry is needed to effectively maximize the social media. For instance, practitioners will need to be able to analyse how new technologies can aide or hinder traditional public relations roles like public information dissemination, media relations reputation management, stakeholder relations, marketing communication, investor relations and issues and crisis management (Melanie, 2008). That is, practitioners should be able to determine when and when not to use the social or traditional media. This in itself requires some level of training. Eventually, finding time, funds and support for upgrading PR practitioners' skills and engaging in professional development experience may continue to be challenging (Melanie, 2008).

Another foreseeable challenge to the use of social media in PR practice is the risk of losing the profession to charlatans and quacks. This could be linked to the journalism profession where one claims to be a journalist because one can write or speak fluently. Already bloggers are fast taking over the journalism profession. We should also expect this in the coming years, where organizations would employ persons as PR practitioners simply on the grounds that they are social media savvy. The implication of this is that PR practitioners, who are yet to up their ante could soon be shown the way out of a number of organizations.

Moreover, the negative notions that have trailed the social media sites in recent times in Nigerian do not particularly make the channels veritable for many a Nigerian. This perception has been borne out of the many nefarious activities some social media users in Nigeria have been involved. Many Nigerians relate with issues on the social media sites with little or no credibility and authenticity.

The pervasive menace of Yahoo-Yahoo internet fraudsters has shaped the perception of many supply of certain personal information (Chukwu & Uzoma, 2014). Then, there is the small matter of social media limitation in reaching rural people and non-social media users.

**Research Methodologies**

The survey design was employed for this study. The population of the study comprised members of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) Rivers State Branch. The membership population is put at 1,052 (NIPR, Rivers State, 2018). The required sample size was computed using the Checkmarket.com online sample size calculator. The sample size is 282. Moreso, purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents, who are all PR practitioners. Validity of research instrument was done on the face and content value by a lecturer in the department of English and Communication, Arts University of Education, Port Harcourt. Instrument reliability was done using the test-retest method. This was to ensure consistency of the outcome that is in an event that all the elements remain the same. Meanwhile, data were collected using the questionnaire. Data generated from the questionnaire were analyzed using tables, percentages, frequency and weighted mean scores.

**Data Presentation/Analysis**

Research Question 1: What is the level of social media usage by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State? This question was addressed by item 4 in the questionnaire. It sought to examine the level of social media usage by PR practitioners in Rivers State. The result is presented in the table below:

**Table 1: Responses on the level of social media usage by PR practitioners in Rivers State**

Options	Frequency	Percentage	WMS	Decision
Very high	40	14.2	3.0	Accepted
High	97	34.4		
Undecided	5	1.8		
Low	103	36.5		
Very low	37	13.1		
<b>Total</b>	282	100		

Table 1 above shows that most of the respondents (103 or 36.5%) believe that social media usage by PR practitioners in Rivers State is low. This result is accepted on a weighted mean score of 3.0. This is indicative of the fact that public relations practitioners appear to be still stuck to the conventional means of organizational communications and are yet to fully embrace the social media as a means to reaching out to their publics.

Research Question 2: To what extent has social media use by PR practitioners helped in improving organizations’ image and public’s goodwill? This question sought to evaluate the extent social media use by PR practitioners has helped to improve their organization’s image and public goodwill. It was addressed by item 7 in the questionnaire. The result is presented in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Response in the extent social media use is improving organizational image and public’s goodwill.**

Options	Frequency	Percentage	WMS	Decision
Very high extent	43	15.2	3.2	Accepted
High extent	113	40.1		
Undecided	4	1.4		
Low extent	102	36.2		
Very low extent	20	7.1		
<b>Total</b>	282	100		

Table 2 above shows that most of the respondents (113 or 40.1) averse that social media use by PR practitioners in Rivers State has improved organizations’ image and publics goodwill to a high extent. This result is accepted on a weighted mean score of 3.2. It implies that PR practitioners are closing the seeming communication lacuna that exists between organizations and their publics by engaging them through the various social media platforms. Arguably this is helping to improve organizations’ image and publics’ goodwill.



Research Question Three: What challenges are inherent in the use of social media by public relation practitioners in organization in Rivers State? This question sought to identify the possible challenges in PR practitioners' use of the social media in improving organization's image and goodwill. It was addressed by item 10 in the questionnaire. The result is presented in the table below:

**Table 3 responses on inherent challenges in the use of social media by PR practitioners in organization in Rivers State**

Challenges	SA	A	U	D	SD	WMS	Decision
Lack of funding	35	106	2	111	28	3.0	Accepted
Adherence to conventional organizational communication means/policy	42	118	5	89	33	3.2	Accepted
Limited reach to target publics	32	74	6	121	49	2.7	Rejected
Fear of undue criticism	30	73	8	119	52	2.7	Rejected
PR practitioners are averse to using social media	51	119	5	77	30	3.3	Accepted
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>282</b>		

Table 3 above shows that PR practitioners' averseness to using social media (119) seems to be the most challenge in its use in organization. Yet most respondents (12) disagree that limited reach to target publics is a challenge in the use of social media by PR practitioners in organization in Rivers State. These results are accepted and rejected respectively on the weighted mean score of 3.3 and 2.7 respectively. The implication of this result is that it does appear that PR practitioners prefer to use other means of communication to engage their publics than the social media.

### Discussion of Findings

Finding in research question 1 reveals that social media usage by PR practitioners in Rivers State is low. This result is indicative of the fact that despite the fact that more persons are coming to term with the usefulness of the social media in reaching out to more persons, practitioners in Rivers State are yet to maximize the latent potential of the platforms in their organizational communication paradigm. This finding contradicts (Dolwick, 2009, Rictzmann & Kistophers, 2011) cited in (Chukwu & Ugom, 2004). Moreso, the finding confirms the statement of the problem of this study to the effect that a number of public relation practitioners would have risen through the ranks with a member of them being adverse to new media technologies, especially the social media. There are chances that they will continue to prefer the traditional media of communication to the social media. Conversely, the finding confirms Eyrich et al. (2008) cited in Wigley & Zhang (2011) who observe that "while public relation professionals have adopted more established tools such as e-mail and intranet, they have yet to fully embrace more advanced tool such as social networking and virtual worlds" (p.2). Similarly, the study also confirms Wright Hinson (2009) whose study revealed that forty-eight (48%) percent of respondents said they spend between one and ten percent of their working time with social media. Seven percent (7%) revealed that they rather spend more time using search engine than they do social media.

Yet, the study contradicts Wigley & Zhang (2011) who in their study indicated that "more than three quarters (76.1%) of working PR professionals often and always used social media in practice. In total, 97.2% (N = 242) of them used social media in their practices" (p6). Again, the finding confirms Water, Burnett Lamm and Lueas (2009) cited in Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi (2015). Burnett et al. (2009) cited in Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi (2015), did a content analysis 275 non-profit organization profits or Facebook to assess how they had used social networking sites to promote their organizational mission and programmes. The study discovered that non-profit organizations had not integrated most of the numerous interactive Facebook applications on their profile. They failed to capitalize on the interactivity of social networking, and consequently Facebook (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015).

The point is that communication is cardinal for the survival of every organization. Public relation practitioners must realize that the world is fast going virtual, including their publics. From the foregoing public relation practitioners, such as organization, may need to reconsider and augment their traditional approaches (Andoh-Quainoo & Annor-Antwi, 2015). They argue that "building and maintaining relationships with key publics have paradoxically become both easier and difficult-easier because communication options are now available and difficult as publics have a significant amount of control over content, as opposed to traditional public relation".

Meanwhile finding in research 2 shows that social media hold greater potential in improving organizational image and public's goodwill, incidentally, the incessant crises between organization and their publics in mainly

occasioned by breakdown in communication, arguably, the advent of social media has demoralized communication; giving every user to leverage to express their positions on certain issues. In this current online space, public relations practice has become more transparent as communication is laid bare (that is on the Internet where everyone has democratic access), this has been facilitated by the rise of social media (Breakenridge, 2012).

Interestingly, the social media provide public relation practitioners and organizations a unique opportunity to reach many more publics than was previously imagined (Khan & Far, 2015, cited in Dii 2018). The implication of this is that organization can begin to get first hand, the reaction of their publics and respond accordingly in real time when necessary. Now, it is this constant engagement between organization and their publics that more likely bridges the communication lacuna and as such contains mistrust. This study confirms Anas (2016) whose study showed that there is an impact of public relation on company image, and an impact of the social media as a moderating variable among public relation and company image. Fundamentally, public relation is about image building. However, its effectiveness is in adopting the right medium in the image building process.

Public relation plays a key role in improving the activities of organizations as well as improving the vision of organization to customers with regard to improving the mental image towards the clients (Anas, 2016). It further confirms Castellano and Khelladi (2016) who argued that “specifically, reputation and image are inherent to the luxury industry, and with social media, they are considered the determinants of e-reputation (p 48), organizations that maintain active social media presence are more likely to sustain its positioning in the cognitive mapping of their publics who are also active in the social media platform. It also enables them increase their feedback loop as well as address negative criticisms directly in (Sundermeier, 2018). Accordingly, Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene (2013) maintain that the competitive nature of the business atmosphere is so tensed that organization must strive to sustain its corporate image.

On the challenges inherent in the use of social media by PR practitioners in organizations in Rivers State, finding in research question 3 indicates that a number of practitioners are averse to its use. It is obviously not in contention that the advent of new media technologies; including the social media have revolutionized communication. Beyond that is the fact that it has broadened communication options and effectively blurred the impediments of time and space. The fact that PR practitioners are still stuck to the traditional public relations paradigm is not only troubling but raises concerns as to their preparedness to meet the growing communication and information demands of the publics. In so far as organizations operate within certain environment, then the tendency to engage their publics becomes inevitable. It is this inevitability of sustaining the corporate image of an organization that informs the incumbency of PR practitioners to adopt convenient and effective means of engagement with their publics.

This finding confirms research question 1 which revealed that PR practitioners’ use of the social media in organizations in Rivers State is low. Yet the finding contradicts McAllister & Taylor (2007) that “the Internet (social media in content) is giving public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues and engages in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues” (p.61). The point is that with this trend of low social media usage by PR practitioners continuing, chances are that the profession many soon lose its relevance in the new communication paradigm. If organizations are not heavily invested in social media and heavily using it in public relations they will fast lose their relevance as PR agencies or practitioners (Edwards, 2018). Edwards argue that social media provides direct links to qualified audiences, it is cheaper, it is current, it makes PR more measurable than ever before. It reaches demographics mainstream.

In the same vein, the study further drives home the fact not many persons have adopted new media technologies. As expected, laggards make up the Diffusion of Innovation process. Accordingly, the group of PR practitioners who are adverse to using social media fall in this category. While the introduction of Web 2.0 Technology and social media is changing public relations practice, it is premature to pressure or conclude that online public relation is now the norm across the industry and this finding just confirm that (Robson & James, 2013).

Conversely, the finding contradicts Dholakiya (2016) who argues that must PR practitioners have made the social media an integral part of their practice and different social media management services. Dholakiya (2016) maintains that social media has had a huge impact not only on people, but also on brands across industries as they devise strategies to engage their audiences and win their loyalty. Public relations (PR) are no different as professionals constantly seek to communicate with and hear from customers, who are ever-present and active on social media (Dholakiya, 2016). Similarly, the finding confirms Gordon (2010) that the “survey of public relation professionals revealed that practitioners value social media more than they actually use it (p.2).

### **Conclusion**

There is no gain saying the fact that the social media has emerged one of the most used means of communication in modern times. Incidentally, organizations do not operate in isolation – they are part of the communication network. This put them in a position to continually interact with their publics. Understandably, these new set of publics have very high demands for communication and information. It therefore becomes incumbent on the PR practitioners to be up to speed with the information demands of the times. Any deliberate or inadvertent moves to keep needed information may breed mistrust and crises.

It is the business of the PR practitioners to leverage on the latent potentials of the social media in bridging the communication lacuna between organizations and its publics. This responsibility is no less tasking. However, the fact that the social media is making the job of the PR practitioners much easier should ordinarily spur them to stretch the social media platforms to the advantage of the organization. By this, they would have contained criticisms and negative perception about the organizations. No doubt, PR practitioners cannot afford to ignore social media's capacity to improve their organizational image.

### **Recommendations**

Drawing from the conclusion, the following recommendations are here put forward:

1. Organizations should create a sub public relations department, for instance, e-public relations unit that will be solely saddled with managing all the organization's social media platforms.
2. There is the need to fund public relations departments to meet up the sustenance of social media presence. Running a sustained social media presence requires data. The quantum of data required is much and as such requires much funding.
3. Organizations' dedicated social media platforms should be managed by trained (social medial) professionals with the right skills to engage (social media) users.
4. Organizations using social media should be prompt in their feedback on issues raised by the publics. This way, organizations would bridge the communication gap with their publics.

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