

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION WITH IT'S FUNCTIONAL PUBLICS: A STUDY OF YENAGOA OFFICE, BAYELSA STATE.

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Abstract

The study appraised the social media usage of public relations department of Niger Delta Development Commission with its functional publics in Yenagoa office. The investigation was hinged on Two - Way Symmetric Model and Technological Determinism Theory. It applied the Survey and Content Analysis to study a sample of 383 which was derived from using the Wimmer and Dominick calculator at 5 percent margin of error. Frequencies and simple percentages were used to collate results of content analysis. Findings show that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most frequently used social media platforms by the public relations department of Niger Delta Development Commission as opined by respondents in this study. The study recommended amongst others that public relations practitioners should efficiently and effectively utilize social media platforms especially WhatsApp, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter to relate and interface with their functional publics.

Keywords: Assessment, Social media, Public Relations, Functional Publics.

Introduction

Social media are websites and other applications couched within the web 2.0 and programming language that enable their users to create and share contents (information) and to participate in online social networking. Social media share both similarities and differences with the traditional mass media of communication. The similarity lies in the fact that both social media and the mass media observe and allow multi-step flow of communication, where information can be originated by a source and spread by many others who were not the original source of the message but different steps of passing the information.

The difference however, is that whereas social media can actually operate a dialogic transmission system (many sources, many received) mass media messages are originated by a source (the mass mediation), for instance, a radio station before the message can be received and disseminated to other receivers (one source many receivers).

Social media technology operates under several typologies within which the users operate and interact. These typologies are found in the frames of blogs, video blogs (Vblogs) podcasting, social network sites and other components of the virtual world, Business day (2012) reports the revelation about the rising volume of internet usage in Nigeria provoked the thinking of how government establishments that share the same population base and have access to the internet have deployed it extensively in public relations practices. Social media platforms are used by organizations to interact with their functional publics.

The implication is that many organizations, including government agencies, use the social media in their public relations activities. This study assesses the social media usage of the Public Relations Department of NDDC with its functional publics.

Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

The Niger Delta Development Commission was officially inaugurated on December 1, 2000 by the administration of former president Olusegun Obasanjo (NDDC Act, 2000). The commission was established to respond to the massive infrastructural, environmental and ecological decay that was the bane of the Niger Delta region due to the activities of oil exploratory companies in the area, the long neglect of the situation in the region by successful administration in the country and the failure of previous efforts at developing the area.

The Vision of the NDDC is to Offer a Lasting Solution to the Socio-Economic Difficulties of the Region

The Mission Statement: Is to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the area into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful.

The Niger Delta Development Commission Act, 2000 specifically enumerated the following areas of intervention.

- ❖ Surveying the Niger Delta in order to ascertain measures necessary to promote its physical and socio-economic development.
- ❖ Preparing master plans and schemes designed to promote the physical development of the Niger Delta Region.
- ❖ Implementation of the measures approved for the development of the Niger Delta Region by the Federal Government and the states of the Commission.
- ❖ Liaising with the various oil mineral and gas prospecting and producing companies on all matters of pollution, prevention and control.
- ❖ Executing such other works and performing such other functions which in the opinion of the commission are required for the sustainable development of the region and its people (NDDC Act, 2000).
- ❖ The Niger Delta Development Commission has member states as follows: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers States (NDDC Act, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta Development Commission has been charged with the responsibility of developing the nine states of the Niger Delta Region. As a result, the functional publics of the commission are diverse just as the needs are.

Although, the commission recognized the need for media convergence in reaching out to its functional publics, it did this without including the social media in its communication with its functional publics until recently. In other words, mass media in combination with the indigenous modes/media of communication were used to get to the various of the commission before then. However, this did not stop complaints made by many of the commissions publics that they were not involved with the activities of the commission. Hence, the commission decided to adopt the use of social media as one of the strategies in reaching out to all its numerous functional publics. Since the efficacy of social media is dependent on factors such as literacy, availability of internet coverage, and sometimes power source, it become necessary to investigate the relevance of the use of these media in reaching out to the commission's functional publics. The intention is to avoid repeat of complaints which followed the use of the mass media and the indigenous mode/media of communication prior to the inclusion of social media tools in relating with its functional publics.

Given the above realization, the researcher is poised to study to what extent has social media use by Niger Delta Development Commission in its public Relations activities affected the commission's relationships in Yenagoa office with the functional publics.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research was to:

1. Ascertain the most frequently used of the social media by NDDC in its public Relations activities with the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office.
2. Find the extent to which the public relations Department of NDDC has used the social media in relating with the commission functional publics.
3. Ascertain if the use of the social media in public relations activities of NDDC has improved goodwill of the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office.
4. Find out which public relations functions of NDDC that is most suitable for social media use.

Research Questions

1. Which social media platform does the NDDC frequently use in the commission's public relations activities with its functional publics in Yenagoa office.
2. To what extent has the public relations department of the NDDC used the social media in relating with the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office.

3. To what extent has the use of the social media by the public relations department of the NDDC in its activities improved the goodwill of the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office?
4. Which public relations functions of NDDC is the most suitable for the social media use in Yenagoa office of the commission.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be guided by the following theories; the two-way symmetric model, technological Determinism Theory.

Two-Way Symmetric Model

This model as propounded by Grunig and Hart (1992) to ethically explain what public relations management is and does – communication, dialogue, feedback, establishment and maintenance of mutual understanding and harmonious relationship between an organization and its publics Tech and Yeomans, (2014). This model sees public relations practitioners as communicators, mediators and persuaders.

They communicate and relate with the publics of an organization (Internal and external) and strive to constantly maintain a robust relationship between them (Sledzik, 2008).

The implication of this task, is that the public relations activities of an organization involve constant interaction with the public's of the organization through designated communication resources Nwodu (2007), Gould and Lewis (2012) also opined that these communication resources adopted by an organization must not only be known but also can be accessed and used by the public's of the organization. Ndimele and Kasarachi (2006) further averred that it is based on the understanding of the importance of a clear frame of reference towards effective communication.

This theory shares some relationship with the current study since it is concerned with the effort or task of public relations through communication to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.

Technological Determinism Theory

According to Mc Quail (2010), the technological determinism theory as formulated by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. According to Heath (2005) the technological determinism theory states that “the nature of societies, organizations and communication is shaped by technologies employed” (p.166). This ascertains provides a semblance of the world over and above the less technologically developed climes. Chandler (1995) argues that particular technological developments communication technologies and the media are the sole drivers of social change.

The technological determinism theory is a premise upon which this study is situated because when technologies are functionally applied, they should be able to equip members of the social system not only to share ideas, etc. but also to participate meaningfully in the accelerated transformation of their environment. UNESCO (1980) argues that if the exchange of information becomes broader, misleading ideas would be outweighed and checked by knowledge and enlightenment at the disposal of members of the society.

Conceptual Review

Public Relations

Public relations' is defined by different authors and scholars in different ways. According to the chartered institute of public relations (CIPR), quoted by Oliver (2008), public relations involves the activity of gaining public acceptance, understanding and support for an organization through the communication of the organization's personality and demonstration of responsible corporate character. Also, the public relations society of America (PRSA) defines public relations as the process of creating mutual understanding among groups and institutions.

British institute of public Relations (BIPR) also states that public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between organization and its publics. Public relation is defined as management function that creates, develops and carries out policies and programmes to influence public opinions or reactions about an idea, a product or an organization.

In his definition, Reddi (2009) describes public relations as the management of relationships between organizations and cites stakeholders or publics. This relationship is fundamental since no cooperation and support can result without it. Ohlagu (2010) describes public relations as every calculated, systematic and Conscious effort by an organization to achieve ongoing mutually beneficial relationships with any of its publics” (p. 406). It could be added that this relationship is required from every public of an organization

whether they occupy central or peripheral status.

Social Media

Social media are interacting based platforms that allow people or organizations to create, share, or exchange information, career interest, ideas, pictures and videos in virtual communities and networks Safko (2010). Nations (2016) defines social media as web-based communication platforms that enable people to interact with each other by both sharing and consuming information. These media incorporate but, however, not limited to the following internet-based applications such as Electronic mails, video conferencing, social network sites, Blogs, microblogs, video news release, snapchat, multi-media message etc.

Review of Empirical Studies

Wright and Hinso (2014) carried out a study entitled: An updated examination of social and emerging media use in public relations practice: A longitudinal analysis between 2006 and 2014. The main objective of the study was to ascertain the changes which the social and other emerging media have brought to the practice of public relations.

The population of the study comprised the membership of the public relations society of America (PRSA), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and the institute of public Relations (IPR). The research design the study used was survey, while data were obtained using the questionnaire. The findings indicated that social and other emerging media have greatly enhanced and changed the practice of public relations, especially in communicating with external publics.

This study carried out by Wright and Hinson (2014) is relevant to the current study since both are concerned with the place of the social media in the public relations activities of corporate organizations.

Parveen (2012) carried out a study entitled, impact of social media usage on organizations. Among other objectives, the study sought to find out the level of social media usage in Malagsian organizations, to find out why organizations use social media; and to ascertain how social media benefits organizations. The population of the study was 860 Malaysian listed companies that were using the social media in their business operations. The research design the study used was a sequential mixed design. The study conducted a census of these organizations except for 43 whose internet links were either broken down or yet being installed, while the data gathering instruments were website analysis, indepth-interviews and the questionnaire.

The study found out that all of the organizations, except the 43 whose internet installations were either broken down or being installed at the time of the study were using social media tools such as facebook, twitter, Youtube, flickr, and blog.

Based on the findings, the study recommended, among other things, that organizations should carefully plan and adopt social media due to their many benefits in enhancing organizational performance, especially as it concerns building or improving relationship with people and groups that have some links with them. It encouraged organizations which did not have social media links to embrace the usefulness of the social media in improving interactions and interface with their functional publics.

The above study is relevant to the current study since both are concerned with the role of the social media in promoting healthy interactions or relationship between an organization and its functional publics.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research designs that will be used for this study are the survey and content analysis. Survey is a study of the characteristic of a sample using questions. This method enables a researcher to make generalization regarding the entire population of the study Wimmer and Dominick (2011). The survey is considered appropriate for the study because, it will provide the researcher the avenue to examine certain variables such as attitudes, motivates, opinions etc. survey is also appropriate for this study because it will be used to describe, analyze, and explored the response, opinions, attitudes and preferences of the functional public of the NDDC with respect to the social media platforms the commission uses in communicating with these functional publics.

The study will also use content analysis to examine the extent of social media transactions between the NDDC and its functional publics. Walizer and Wiener (1978), defines content analysis as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of printed and recorded information (p.156). The choice of the content analysis for this study is to evaluate social media documents of the public relations department of NDDC in comparison with responses that will be generated from the survey.

The population of the study comprises all the subjects elements, cases, people etc. about which the researcher, requires information regarding the phenomenon being investigated, Payre and Payre (2004),

Ihejirika and Omego (2011). The population of this study will comprise the population of the functional public of the NDDC, host communities, civil society organizations, contractors to the commission, the media and the international oil companies (IOC) operating in the Niger Delta region which collaborate with the commission.

The study population will also involve the staff of the public relations department of the commission. With all these sub groups, the population will be large therefore, the researcher is expected to use the United Nations projected index of 2.28% to extrapolate and predict the new population from the last known figure. The sample size 383 was derived from using the Wimmer and Dominick calculator at 5% margin of error.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Out of the 383 copies of questionnaire that was administered on three hundred and eighty three (383) persons or respondents, only three hundred and sixty (360) copies were found usable while the remaining (23) twenty three copies were not returned. This was as a result of mutilation on the papers. The table below shows the return rate of the questionnaire 15 were mutilated and 8 were not returned.

Table 1.1: Return Rate of Questionnaire

	No of respondents	Percentage %
Return and fund usable	360	93.9
Not usable	15	4.1
Not returned	8	2.0
Total number of questionnaire distributed	383	100 00%

Table 1.1 shows the return rate of 93.9% which were found usable while the rates of invalid copies were 6.01%.

Research Question One

Which social media platform does the NDDC frequently use in the commission's public relations activities with its function publics in Yenagoa office?

Table 1.2: Analysis of the frequently used social media in the NDDCs public relations activities with its functional publics in Yenagoa office?

Social media platforms	No of respondents	Percentage %
Facebook	104	28.9%
YouTube	60	16.7%
WhatsApp	170	47.2%
Flickr	10	2.8%
Twitter	16	4.4%
Total	360	100%

In answering the research question above, table 1.2 was relied upon. The finding indicated that 104 respondents representing 28.9% farmed facebook, 60 respondents representing 16.7% for YouTube, 170 respondents representing 47.2% chose WhatsApp as the frequently used social media in the commission's public relations activities with its functional public in Yenagoa office while, 10 respondents representing 2.8% favour Flickr, and 16 respondents representing 4.4% said twitter is the frequently used social media platform used in the commission's public relations activities.

Research Question Two

To what extent has the public relations department of NDDC used, the social media in relating with the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Increasing brand activity	67	18.6%
Accessibility to functional publics of the commission	206	57.3%
Partnering with relevant agencies and parastatals	87	24.1%
Total	360	100%

The above table 1.3 indicates that 67 respondents representing 18.6% said that social media is used to increase the brand activity of the commission, while 206 respondents representing 57.3% supports social media accessibility to the commission functional publics in Yenagoa office and also 87 respondents representing 24.1% said that social media is used to partner with relevant agencies and parastatals

Research Question Three

To what extent has the use of social media by the public relations department of NDDC in its activities improved the goodwill of the commission's functional publics in Yenagoa office?

Table 1.4 Opinion

Response	Frequency	Percentage
It has brought about inherent goodwill to the functional publics of the commission.	98	27.2%
Use of social media by the PR department has strengthened and enabled free flow of communication	91	25.3%
It has reduced the burden of information to the commission's functional publics	171	47.5%
Total	360	100%

The table above presents 98 respondent representing 27.2% which say social media has brought about inherent goodwill to the commission's publics, however, 91 (25.3%) think that the use of social media by PR department of NDDC has strengthened and enabled free flow of communication, while 171 (47.5%) say it has reduced the burden of information to NDDC functional publics.

Research Question Four

Which public relations functions of NDDC is the most suitable for the social media use in Yenagoa office of the commission?

Table 1.5 Opinion

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Media relations which is preparing position papers on issues of importance to the commission	212	58.9%
Crisis communication designed to protect and defend individuals or organization.	18	5.0%
Social media management which is in charge of representing the commission (NDDC) across social channels.	130	36.1%
Total	360	100%

Table 1.5 presents 212 respondents representing 58.9% who say media relations is the most suitable public relations function for social media use in Yenagoa office of the commission, however, 18 (5.0%) think that crisis communication is the most suitable, while, 130 respondents representing 36.1% say social media management is the most suitable public relations function for social media in Yenagoa office of the commission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the similarities between social media and mass media lie in the fact that both observe and allow multistep flows of communication. The difference, however, is that whereas social media can actually operate a dialogic transmission system (many sources – many receivers), mass media messages are originated by source (the mass medium). Social media platforms are used by the public relations department of NDDC to interface, and interact with their functional publics especially in the areas media relations, crisis management, social media management, research and development etc.

WhatsApp and Facebook are the most frequently used social media platforms by the public relations department of NDDC as opined by respondents in this study. Thus, social media usage of public relations department of NDDC to interface with its functional publics

yielded fruitful results.

Recommendations

- 1) There is needs to be conversational using social media platform to focus on issues that will enhance goodwill and usher symbiotic relationship between organization and functional publics.
- 2) Public relations practitioners should prudently utilized social media platforms, especially WhatsApp, Facebook, Flickr YouTube and twitter to relate and interface with their functional publics.
- 3) Corporate organizations or companies should not merely depend on social media but, should also look at other forms of social interactions such as, exchange competition cooperation and accommodation competition.

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