

# An Evaluation of Impact of Social Media on Information Management in Public Relations Practice

Achor, Princewell N<sup>1</sup>, Nwachukwu, Chima P<sup>2</sup>, Nkwocha Charles Azubuike<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Enugu, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Marketing, Abia State Polytechnic, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup>Department of Marketing, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, Imo State, Nigeria

**Abstract:** *This paper is one of the on-going efforts to explore the use of social media in public relations practice. It examines the impact of social media on information management of Public Relations Practitioners. Opinions of 225 members of Nigeria Institute of Public Relations were used to evaluate the issues/thrust of the paper. Findings show that the use of facebook by Public Relations Practitioners ranked first, followed by twitter, blogs, MySpace, etc. Social media has positively impacted information management in terms of access, processing, speed of delivery/dissemination and flow of information in a multi-directional paradigm compared to unidirectional flow that characterize the traditional mainstream media practices or landscape. The social media tools have facilitated relational and dialogic communications which are key components of dialogic theory of public relations management. Also the social media tools have enhanced the gatekeeping role of Public Relations Practitioners. This study has also lay credence to the emerging notion that digital media has redefined gatekeeping theory. The paper concludes that the imperative of information management hinge on the philosophy of creating and sustaining mutual understanding, and knowledge based on two-way symmetric communication backed by truth, transparency, honesty and respect. More importantly, social media offers Public Relations Professionals the best access to information and better platforms for instantaneous information delivery and communication.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Information Management, Public Relations Practitioners, Gatekeeping

## 1. Introduction

Information and communications management is a key function Public Relations Practitioners perform. As a precursor to other specialized functions, information and communication management confer on public relations professionals the gatekeepers' role [1]. As formal gatekeepers, they are strongly connected to internal audiences as well as external audiences; they are capable of translating organizational information across communication boundaries [2]. The information and communication management function in modern Public Relations entails systematic gathering, planning of information, analyzing them to determine their relevance to organisational and individual needs; and designing appropriate communication plan that effectively informs and educates targeted organization's public. According to Achor, it also refers to proactively communicating to various organizational publics and effectively managing misinformation, misunderstanding, negative and positive reactions of communication audiences which may apparently arise from channel distortions, semantic or encoding/decoding problems and other environmental factors affecting communication process and delivery [3];[4];[5].

In performing this function, Public Relations Practitioners rely on a number of resources, media techniques, methodologies or communication platforms. These resources, media techniques or platforms are broadly divided into two: the traditional, mainstream or conventional (orthodox) communication media (resources) and the new information and communication technologies (NICTs), which social media belongs to. Both have their merits and

demerits. We are not concerned herewith the benefits or demerits of the former division but of the later and how it impacts on the public relations information management. Social media are increasingly changing the way Public Relations Practitioners' communicate and perform their jobs, particularly, information management. This notion is highly documented in Communication and Public Relations literature and lays credence to scholars observations that social media has not only altered some of the conventional communication orthodoxies[6];[7];[1]but has also reconfigure public relations media landscape and communication ecology [8],[9][10].

Social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, You Tube, blogs, etc have formed an integral part of public relations practitioners' organizational media mix, plan or strategy. More importantly, there is a consensus among communication practitioners that traditional/ conventional media of communication have been redefined to the extent that their usages in any public relations campaign are determined by the prevalent social media and other ICT resources [7];[11];[12];[13];[14]. One broad reason advanced in support of the above notion anchor on numerous benefits social media offer to organisations, governments, individuals and indeed communication-oriented professions. For instance, Wright and Hinson [13] submit that one clear promise of social media is an increase in communication of all kinds, between individuals and also between organizations and governments. The speed of information flow in the social media and its power to encourage relational and dialogic communication has also been applauded in public relations circles and other similar domains.

In spite of these and other laudable benefits of social media use in public relations, issues of how they facilitate organizational information management in terms of gathering, processing and dissemination to various publics need to be further investigated. Again, organizational information management anchor on gatekeeping role of Public Relations Practitioners. And if that is the case, has social media facilitated or altered this role? Organizational information management is always put to test or challenged during crisis situation because of the image and reputational effect of the crisis in the organization. Given the adoption of social media by organizations, of what effect has social media on information management during crisis planning? All these form the context on which the study evaluates social media impact on information management.

Basically, the broad objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of social media on information management of Public Relations Practitioners in Nigeria. The specific objectives include: (i) to identify and examine different social media platforms used by Public Relations Practitioners; (ii) to determine specific impact of each of the social media platforms on information gathering, processing and dissemination to publics; (iii) to find out if social media has either facilitated or altered the gatekeeping role of Public Relations Practitioners; and finally, to (iv) find out if adoption of social media in planning organizational crisis impact positively on information management.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1a: How often do Public Relations Professionals use social media?

RQ1b: What are these social media platforms?

RQ2a: What are the specific impact each of the social media has on information gathering and dissemination?

RQ2b: How do Public Relations practitioner organization use social media?

RQ3a: Has social media positively enhanced the gatekeeping role of Public Relations Practitioners?

RQ4a: How much do Public Relations Practitioners organizations rely on different types of social media tools for crisis planning?

RQ4b: Has adoption of social media in crisis planning impacted positively on information management?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Media: A conceptual Framework

Social media is a buzz phrase or coinage that has enjoyed wider discussions in almost all spheres of human endeavour or disciplines. These media platforms have revolutionized how individuals, organizations engage in personal and corporate communications [15]; [16]; [17]; [13]; [18]; [1]; [10]; [19] Jenkins (2006) describes the emergence of social media in media and communication industries as another paradigm shift from mainstream media such as newspapers, magazine, television, radio, etc to a hyper media [19]; [20]. This shift has enabled the development of communication channels that have allowed publics (people, stakeholders) to be more in control of what they read, hear and Watch [21]; [5]. Despite the prevalence of social media and those who use these channels, the

definition of what constitutes social media is still developing or fluid. Attempt is made here to present some of the conceptualizations of social media as found in the literature. Safko and Brake refer to social media as “activities, practices, and behaviour among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media” [22]. According to Ahlgvist, Back, Haloner & Helmonen social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and network [23]. Dykeman (2008) describes social media as a place for humans to use internets and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information [24].

Kaplan & Haenlein define social media as “a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user – generated content (UGC) [25]. In mainstream media and pop culture, social media are often used to describe web sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and all places where humans can go to interact and engage with others by simply logging on through a computer or mobile device. Kietzmann & Kristopher (2011) similarly note that social media “depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” [26]. Furthermore, Palen’s (2008) definition of social media is akin to Kaplan & Haenlein’s definition above. Palen (2008) describes social media as “blogs, social networking environments, person-to-person broadcasting messaging and other Web 2.0 applications [27]. The web is a network of information resources and a powerful communication tool; information on virtually any subject can be found on the web. To Vender Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, the Web provides an “all-purpose communication medium” [28]. Literature on web 2.0 indicates that it forms the underlying communication architecture of social media. Web 2.0 is described as the development in the way that people use the internet that allow users free access and give them more control over information (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). As working definition, social media refers to digital mediated platforms and applications that allow individuals, group, organizations and their publics, or a community of people gather online to converse, share information, knowledge and opinions. Its features include open interactivity, collaborations, conversation and harnessing collective intelligence. The characteristics of social media as expressed in those terms above, align closely with definition of Excellence in public relations as outlined by Dozier & Grunig [29]; Grunig & Grunig [30]; Grunig & Dozier [31] and dialogic models of public relations as discussed by Kent and Taylor (2002) and others [32].

### 2.2 Taxonomy of Social Media

Social media are still evolving and will continue to evolve as far as the frontiers of information communication technologies or computer mediated platforms continue to expand [1]; [5]. The fluid nature or descriptions of social medium have made it imperative here to identify their nomenclature and typologies. Literature indicates that social media technologies take on many different forms including

magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking[33];[12]. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowd sourcing and voice over IP, etc. It is important to note that many of these services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms. Based on the application of a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness); public relations excellence and dialogic communication and; social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) seven different types of social media can be identified.

They include:

- (i) Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia);
- (ii) Blogs and microblogs (e.g; Twitter, LinkedIn);
- (iii) Content communities (e.g. YouTube and Daily motion);
- (iv) Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook);
- (v) Virtual game Worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and;
- (vi) Virtual social Worlds (e.g. Second Life) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010);
- (vii) Content publishing (e.g. wikis)[1];[5]

Boundaries between these different types have been increasingly blurred; this is largely due to their interface and similarities in information production and delivery. For this reason, Shi & Whinston [34] argue that Twitter, as a combination of broadcasting service and social network is better to be classified as a social broadcasting technology. Apart from the above typologies, there is also mobile social media. When social media is used in combination with mobile devices it is called mobile social media [25]. Social media is a group of mobile marketing applications that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content [35]. A distinction can be made between the traditional social media and mobile social media. Due to the fact that mobile social media runs on mobile device, it differentiates from traditional social media as it incorporates new factors such as the current location of the user (location-sensitivity) or the time delay between sending and receiving messages (time-sensitivity). According to Kaplan (2012) mobile social media applications can be differentiated among four types:

- 1) Space-timers (location and time sensitive): Exchange of messages with relevance for one specific location at one specific point-in time (e.g; Facebook places; foursquare).
- 2) Space – locators (only location sensitive): Exchange of messages, with relevance for one specific location, which are tagged to a certain place and read later by others (e.g. Yelp; Qype).
- 3) Quick – timers (only time sensitive): Transfer of traditional social media applications to mobile devices to increase immediacy (e.g. posting Twitter message or Facebook status updates)
- 4) Slow – timers (neither location, nor time sensitive): Transfer devices (e.g. watching a YouTube Video or reading a Wikipedia entry).

Based on a synthesis of interdisciplinary uses and applications of social media, other typologies exist; they are not discussed here because of their less value in this study. Having identified different social media classifications, it imperative to mention some the social media platforms used

by public relations practitioners in organizational settings or corporate communications. These include facebook twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, blogs, You Tube, etc.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework

The interface between public relations and social emerging media anchor on communication and information dissemination. The academic literature has been dominated by attempts to apply Grunig and Hunt [36] two-way symmetrical model of communication to examine the potential of new media to build constructive relationships between organizations and their publics. The use of organizational social media or new media platforms as a tool for facilitating two-way communication between organizations and their publics has been studied and advocated widely by public relations researchers and practitioners like Kent & Taylor[37]; Ki & Hon,[38]; Wright & Hinson[39], Wigley & Zhang[10]. Kent and Taylor in 1998 had argued that the nature of interest or websites offers a unique opportunity to public relations practitioners to create dialogue with their publics [37]. Based on the above submissions, the dialogic theory is adopted as a theoretical framework.

#### 2.3.1 Dialogic Theory of Public Relations

The dialogue theory existed before the emergence of social media; it focused on the use of internet websites to stimulate communication in any organization. However, its principles and strategies suit the tenets of social mediated organizations' communications and has been adopted here as a theoretical framework. Kent and Taylor in 1998 developed this theory which states that the internet presents an opportunity for organizations to develop true discourse between organizations and their publics and that the terms "dialogue" and "dialogic" are becoming prevalent in describing ethical and practical approaches to communication in academic and industry as public relations theory and research move toward a two-way relational communication model [32][37]. The Kent and Taylor concept of dialogue is noted in philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and rational communication theory. At the heart of dialogic theory is what the authors refer to as "dialogic communication", which is defined as a particular type of relational interaction occurring in a context where a relationship already exists. Kent and Taylor note that Johannesen as early as 1974, suggested that dialogue is intimately connected with concepts such as honesty concern for the audience genuineness, open-mindedness, empathy, lack of pretense, non manipulative intent, and encouragement of free expression. These concepts are features of the social media, particularly, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, etc.

Pearson (1989) applied these ideas to public relations, arguing that Plato was perhaps the first person to connect the idea of dialogue to certain desirable and ethically preferable styles of communication. Three procedures useful for facilitating dialogue were also listed by Pearson [40]. These include: (a) that no topic should be excluded or prior from discussion, (b) that no type of communication be considered a prior as inappropriate or irrational and (c) that during

discourse, communicators have the option of changing levels of reflexivity.

Kent and Taylor (2002) synthesized these ideas, and described dialogue as an orientation that includes several overarching tenets of dialogism [32]. These tenets are the first step toward understanding the concepts of the dialogic theory: mutuality, or the recognition of organization-public relationships, propinquity, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics; empathy, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interest; risk, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms; and finally, commitment, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to the public[41].

In terms of building interpersonal relationships, Kent and Taylor explain that all organizational members who communicate with the public must be comfortable engaging in dialogues. They stated that necessary skills needed to achieve dialogic communication include: listening, empathy, being able to contextualize issues within local, national and international frameworks, being able to identify common grounds between parties, thinking about long-term rather than short-term objectives, seeking out groups or individuals with opposing viewpoints, and soliciting a variety of internal and external opinions on policy issues [32]. According to Kent & Taylor while dialogue “cannot guarantee ethical public relations outcomes, a dialogic communication orientation does increase the likelihood that publics and organizations will better understand each other and have ground rules for communication”[32].

For mediated dialogic relationships, Kent and Taylor (2002) suggest practical steps that organizations can take to reinforce their commitment to dialogue. Examples include placing e-mail, web addresses, toll-free telephone numbers, and organizational addresses prominently in advertisements, on organizational literature and on all correspondence that appears in public forums. Furthermore creating organizational social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Digg and Focus, etc. are among the simple steps (including those discussed above) that encourage members of publics to engage others in discussions about organizational issues (emphasis added by this author). Kent & Taylor discussed how websites can be used to create dialogue with an organization’s publics [32]. To serve as guidelines for the successful integration of dialogic communication in public relations practice, Kent and Taylor offer five principles to facilitate dialogic relationships with publics through the internet[32];[37].

## 2.4 Empirical Framework

Scholars like Wright & Hinson, 2006a; 2006b, 2007a; 2008; 2011a, 2011b; Wigley and Zhang 2011; Pew Research Center 2005, 2008; Key 2005) have also begun to explore public relations practitioners’ generally social media usage and their impact on public relations practice.[43];[44];[47];[48];[42] Other researchers have also surveyed literature to explore key areas where practitioners abuse social media[18]. The Pew Research Center in 2005, 2008 and 2011 did an annual tracks of sources Americans

use for news and to receive information. The finding of this study showed that more people were getting their news online than traditional mass media. The study revealed that blogs, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn were popular among corporate bodies as well as private individuals. In their study of Website use of Public Relations Agencies, Wirtz & Ngondo discovered that many PR agencies use the social media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube [41]. Similar results have been reported by Wright & Hinson in 2011[42].

Since 2005, Wright and Hinson have conducted annual surveys measuring the impact social and other emerging technologies are having on public relations [44];[46];[47];[48];[49];[50];[51];[52];[53];[54];[55];[56];[57];[58];[59];[60]. Results of these studies show that these new communications media have brought dramatic changes to many aspects of the field. Their findings also suggest that the development of various new technologies has significantly empowered a wide variety of strategic publics by giving them dynamics new media they are using to communicate effectively with a variety of internal and external audiences.

Jenkins [19] believes many public relations people fear employee blogs because they “are reluctant to let go of the communication reins”. Jenkins says “90% of this (concern is attributable to) loss of message control”. Conlin and Park [61] cited in Wright & Hinson [47] claim many companies are willing to give up the message control because they now realize employee bloggers can develop meaningful relationships with customers.

The adoption of social media into crisis plan has been reported in a research findings conducted by Wigly & Zhang [10]. It was found that Public Relations Professionals whose organizations rely more heavily on social media tools in their crisis planning correlated positively with practitioners’ greater confidence in their organization’s ability to handle a crisis. Social media use in the area of crisis communication has been studied by scholars. In their study on crisis communication and technology, Gonzales-Herero and Smith [62] emphasize how the Internet and Social media can aid in a crisis but can also trigger one. They also note how organizations must now include issues of hacking, negative blogging movements and other Internet-based problems in their crisis plans. In several studies exploring the Web sites of organizations in crisis, researchers discovered organizations using two-way dialogic communication tools such as links, audio and video [63];[64].

## 3. Research and Method

Approached from quantitative research design, survey research was used in the execution of the study. Survey research method was preferred to other methods because it allows the researchers to focus attention on representative samples denoted from the entire population. This method to data collection enabled the researchers to gain insight into and rich experience of Public Relations Practitioners who are information managers and gatekeepers in their various organisations.

The population of the study comprised members of Nigeria Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) who are currently working in Public relations consultancies, public and private corporate businesses/organizations across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Samples studied were selected by means of purposive sampling technique based on their familiarity with social media resources; their level of Public Relations experience and the type of organization in which they work. A total of 225 copies of a questionnaire were distributed to the respondents/participants via email after previously discussing the purpose of the study with them and obtain their cooperation to participate. The instrument, a 16-itemed questionnaire comprised questions aimed at obtaining information about respondents' demography and their responses to the research questions. Secondary information sources such as journals articles books and reports were consulted and gleanings from them formed the bulk of the literature reviewed.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, percentages and mean were adopted. Further analysis was done using five-point Likert scaling. The five point Likert scale was to show the respondents feelings or perceptions on the research questions. The data collated were analyzed using the mean. The scale was assigned weightings as follows: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), strongly disagree (2) and Disagree (1); this gives a total of 15. A cut off point was determined by finding the mean of the nominal value assigned to options using the formula:

$$\text{Mean } \bar{x} = \frac{\sum f}{n}$$

Where  $\Sigma$  = summation value

n = number of item

f = frequency

$$\text{The mean} = \frac{15}{5} = 3.00$$

$$\text{The mean} = \frac{15}{5} = 3.00 + 0.05 = 3.05 \text{ level of significance.}$$

For the purpose of decision making 3.05 and above was accepted as agree while below 3.05 was accepted as disagree.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Results

The analyses of the demographic data of the respondents show that majority of the respondents, 153 (68%) were male while 72(32%) were female. The lowest educational qualification is the National Diploma or its equivalent i.e. 25(11%) respondents. 103(45.7%) either hold first degree or its equivalent; 26 or 11.5% possess postgraduate diploma while 55(24.4%) hold masters degrees while 16 respondents representing 7.1% hold doctoral degrees. The lowest work experience/years spent by respondents in their organizations is between 2-5 years, i.e. 60(26.6%); 82(36.4%) have spent 6-10 years, while 83(32.5%) have work for about 11- 14 years. Of those who reported their Public Relations" role within their organization (n=225), 19.1% were executive (N= 43); more than half (54.6%, n=123) were directors or managers, 18.2% were technicians (n=41), and 8% (n=18) indicated other categories. Other results from the analyzed research data are shown in tables 1 – 6.

**Table 1:** Frequency of Using Social Media by PR Practitioners

Question	Always	Often	Some times	Rarely	Never	Mean
Frequency of using social media	(36%) 87	(32%) 72	(17.7%) 40	(14.2%) 32	(0%) 0	M= 3.85 N= 225

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where "5"=Always & "1"= Never

**Table 2:** Descriptions of Impact of Social Media on Information Gathering, Processing & Dissemination

Descriptions of impact	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagreed	Mean Score
Enhanced the speed & methodology of Information Gathering	(44.8%) 101	(18.6%) 42	(14.6%) 33	(12.8%) 29	(8.8%) 20	M= 3.77 N= 225 SD =
Quickens information processing ,storage & retrieval	(41.3%) 93	(22.6%) 51	(12.8%) 29	(17.7%) 40	(5.3%) 12	M= 3.76 N225
Instantaneous information delivery to the publics	(62.6%) 141	(13.7%) 31	(13.3%) 30	(8.8%) 20	(1.3%) 3	M=4.27 N=225

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where "5"=Strongly agreed; Agreed "4"=Neutral="3"; "2"= Disagreed; "1"= strongly disagreed

Public relations practitioners were asked about their frequency of using the social media ranging from 1 "never", "2" rarely, "3" "sometimes" 4 "often", and "5" "always". As reported in Table 1, more than two quarters, 153 (68%) of working Public Relations Professionals often and always use social media in their professional practice. In total 100% (n= 225) use social media in their practice.

According to Table 2, the most impact of social media on information is its instantaneous dissemination or delivery across many publics or audiences. This is supported by the

mean score of 4.27 and a total of 172 (76.4%) respondents who responded in the affirmative (e.g., strongly agree and agree).The impact of social media tools on information management is that they enhance the speed and methodology of information gathering, processing and dissemination. The mean score is 3.77. As shown in Table 2, more than one quarter (144 or 64%) Public Relations Practitioners agree that social media quickens information processing, storage and retrieval. This shows 3.76 mean score.

**Table 3: Purposes Respondents' Organizations Use Social Media**

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean Score
To communicate with members of traditional media such as newspapers or TV	20 (8.8%)	22 (9.7%)	40 (17.7%)	88 (39.1%)	55 (24.4%)	M= 3.60 N= 225
To listen to what people are saying about the organisation	25 (11%)	13 (5%)	46 (20.4%)	99 (44%)	42 (18.6%)	M= 3.53 N=225
To listen to what people are saying about the competition	10 (4.4%)	21 (9.3%)	48 (21.3%)	87 (38.6%)	59 (26.2%)	M=3.72 N=225
To listen to what people are saying about the industry in general	9 (4%)	20 (8.8%)	51 (22.6%)	82 (36.4%)	63 (28%)	M= 3.75 N= 225
To identify potential problems/issues before they become a crisis	22 (9.7%)	17 (7.5%)	36 (16%)	106 (47.1%)	44 (19.5%)	M= 3.59 N= 225

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where "1"=Strongly disagreed "2"= Disagreed; Neutral= "3"; ;Agreed "4"= "5"= strongly agreed

**Table 4: Social Media Impact on Gatekeeping Role of PR Practitioners**

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
By your own use and assessment, do you agree that social media has enhanced the gatekeeping role of PR Practitioners?	(4.4%) 10	(12%) 27	(18.6%) 42	(41.3%) 93	(23.5%) 53	M= 3.67 N= 225

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where "1"=strongly disagreed "2"= Disagreed; Neutral= "3"; ;Agreed "4"= "5"= strongly agreed

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with several statements concerning various purposes their organizations or client used social media on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree". As seen from the Table 3, mean scores show organizations most likely use social media to listen to what people are saying about the organization (3.75), followed by "listening to what people are saying about the competition (3.72)", "listening to what people are saying about the industry in general (3.60)", "and communicating with members of traditional media" (3.59).

Table 4 reveals social media impact on gatekeeping role of PR professionals. Respondents were asked "considering

their social media use or assessment, if social media have either enhanced or not gatekeeping role of PR professional". More than three quarters of respondents 146(64.8%) agreed that social media enhances the gatekeeping function of public relations professionals. This notion yielded 3.67 mean. Respondents were asked specifically the extent to which their organizations or clients relied on various types of social media on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 "don't rely on at all" to 5 "heavily rely on". As shown in Table 5, mean scores ranging from 1 to 5 show that facebook (2.92) is the social media tool organizations rely on the most, followed by twitter (2.71), blogs(2.26), You Tube(2.22), MySpace(1.86) and flicker(1.74).

**Table 5: Organizations' use of Social Media for Crisis planning/Management**

Social Media Platforms	Don't rely on at all	Rarely rely on	Sometimes rely on	Regularly rely on	Heavily rely on	Mean Score
Facebook	13(5.7%)	58(25.7%)	109(48.4)	23(10.2%)	22(9.7%)	M= 2.92 N=225
Twitter	20(8.8%)	107(47.5%)	33(14.6%)	48(21.3%)	17(7.5%)	M= 2.7 N=225
Myspace	115(51.1%)	33(14.6%)	70(31.1%)	7(2.7%)	0(0%)	M=1.86 N=225
Flicker	103(45.7%)	96(42.6%)	15(6.6%)	2(0.8%)	9(4%)	M=1.74 N =225
You Tube	97(43.1%)	41(18.2%)	41(18.2%)	31(13.7%)	15(6.6%)	M=2.22 N= 225
Blogs	62(27.5%)	94(41.7%)	35(15.5%)	15(6.6%)	19(8.4%)	M=2.26 N=225

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where "1"=don't rely on at all; „5"= heavily rely on

**Table 6:** Description of social Media Impact on Information Management

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean score
Given your answers so far, do you agree that social media has positively impacted on information mgt.	71 (31.5%)	86(38.2%)	31(13.7%)	23(10.2%)	14(6.2%)	<b>M=3.34</b> <b>N= 225</b>

Note: Mean score are based on responses to five-point Likert-type scales where “5”=Strongly agreed; Agreed “4”=Neutral= “3”; “2”= Disagreed; “1”= strongly disagreed

Table 6 indicates respondents’ views or descriptions of impact social media on information management generally. More than half or the respondents 157(69.7%) answered in the affirmative that social media has positively impacted on information management. Data generated on this were subjected to further analysis which yielded a mean score of 3.34. The study also included a couple of open-ended questions which asked how public relations practitioners have incorporated social media tools into their crisis cum general communication plan. Most of the professionals mentioned using social media as another communication tool to disseminate and monitor information in terms of crisis.

Respondents reveal that:

\*In the event of crisis, a coordinated statement and/or instructions will be disseminated via traditional media, social media and on the organization’s internal media (i.e. internet, intranet, signage and phone hold messaging).

- Messages released to media, public, etc. are duplicated on facebook page and reinforced tactics include videos, they are placed on the organization’s websites or You Tube channel.
- Facebook is also used to monitor the informal communication networks to detect misperceptions that need to be corrected and to discover additional concerns among all stakeholder groups”.
- Facebook and twitter platforms are used to create or build interactional relationship or dialogue/ dialogic communication between the organization and publics or stakeholders

## 5. Discussions of Results

Results of this study which surveyed members of the Nigeria Institute of Public Relations revealed a hundred percentage uses of social media by the Public Relations Practitioners. This supports Wigley and Zhang research finding that a large percentage (82%) of Public Relations Practitioners use social media in their daily practice [10]. Also finding of this study seems to contradict findings from Wright and Hinson [52] who found that 48% of respondents spend only one to ten percent of their time working with social media. The findings also differ from Eyrich et al (2008) who found public relations professionals too slow to adopt social networking and that e-mail was the most heavily used form of social media.

In information management, this study reveals that PR professionals heavily rely on facebook(2.92) followed by twitter(2.71) and blogs(2.26). This result corroborates Wigley and Zhang (2011) that facebook and twitter are

mostly relied on by subjects during crisis situation. It also seems to revalidates Wright and Hinson (2010; 2011) research findings of a three-year longitudinal analysis of social and emerging media use in public relations practice. In that study, they found that facebook ranked highest in 2010 and followed by twitter and blogs. This goes to show that social media tools have dominated everyday communication tools and information dissemination and management. Information gathering, processing and delivery are now quickened as characterized by the speed and information flow in social media platforms. Interestingly, respondents use social media to communicate not only in crisis situation but in all ramifications of organizational communications and information management. Practitioners use social media to monitor and scanning for potential crisis, detect misperceptions about the organization.

Unexpectedly, the finding of this study reveals that social media enhances the PR professional gatekeeping role. As a gatekeeper, the PR professional allows or forbids information in the channels they control. Again, this study has shown that as primary gatekeepers, PR professionals are the first gatekeeper of information that passes through channels of communication. Now, they can bypass the traditional mass media gatekeepers and post their messages in the social media such as blogs, facebook, twitter, and video sharing tools like YouTube and Instagram[12]. This notion laid credence to Chin-Fook and Simmonds[65] submission that “Digital media has redefined gatekeeping theory”. This result also is in line with Barzilar-Nahon’s[66]; notion of theory of Network gatekeeping, and Bruce and Delli Carpini’s[67]collapse of media gatekeeping. It is important to acknowledge here that this study did not take detailed study of gatekeeping theories and practices in information management domain. This aspect is covered in Achor’s Doctoral Thesis due for defence [5].

Finally, the study found that social media has positively impacted information management in terms of access, speed of delivery/dissemination and flow of information in a multi-directional paradigm compared to unidirectional flow that characterized the traditional media practices. These social media tools have facilitated relational and dialogic communication which is key components of dialogic theory in public relations management/practice. As with any research study, a few limitations must be addressed. First, a causal study of gatekeeping was done due to need of keeping to the scope of the current study. A full research into the impact of social media on information gatekeeping role of PR professionals needs to be conducted. This, the researchers believe, will unfold mindboggling issues that will aid further research efforts in social media and

information management in Public Relations Practice and Marketing.

## 6. Conclusion

From the discussion of results, social media has reconfigured public relations media landscape and communication ecology; it has also altered the way Public Relations Professional communicates with various stakeholders or publics. The social media tools have giving Public Relations Professionals the latitude to bypass the traditional mainstream media to communicate with the publics. They do this by engaging the publics directly through the use facebook, twitter, YouTube, etc. Information gathering, processing and dissemination are now faster compared with using the controlled traditional mainstream media such as Radio, TV, newspaper etc.

One key methodology of information management is through the concept of gatekeeping. As a gatekeeper, the PR professional is the ear, the eye and the mouth piece of the organization. Though, depending on the type of organization the practitioner work in he/she may have the role or decision to allow access or forbid information to organizational channels of communication, particularly if he/she is a member of the dominant coalition (top management). According to Hamersley and Atkinson [68] "there is no other person more crucial to the communication process of organizations than formal gatekeepers". In a sense, gatekeeping provides key people within organizations the ability to permit or forbid access to organizational information. The imperative of information management hinge on the philosophy of creating and sustaining mutual understanding, and knowledge based on two-way symmetric communication backed by truth, transparency, honesty and respect. However, social media offers the Public Relations Professional better access to information and the best platforms for instantaneous information delivery.

## 7. Future Scope

Further research is needed in the area of negative impact of social media on marketing intelligence and information management in Public Relations and Marketing Units of Corporate bodies. Social media platforms offer a lot of benefits to Public Relations and Marketing but the problems they pose to gathering and managing marketing intelligence needs to be studied by future researchers

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## Author Profile

**Prince Achor** is a Doctoral Candidate with a wide range of research interest that cuts across social media, political marketing, Marketing communication, and public & media relations. He is also a Media and Marketing communication Consultant with over twelve years of practical experience

**Nwachukwu, Chima** is an academic with great research interest in Political & Social Marketing, He is an astute Lecturer in the Department of Marketing , Abia State Polytechnic Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. He is also a Doctoral candidate.

**Nkwocha Charles** is one of the rising academic stars in the Department of Marketing, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo. His research interest cuts across service marketing, marketing communication, brand management, etc.