

**Corporate Communication and Social Media Usage in Universities: A Study on
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Corporate Communication Unit.**

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Abstract

This paper investigates corporate communication and social media usage in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The paper adopted a survey design and questionnaire was used as the research instrument. A sample of 8 staff from the public relation unit of the university was selected. Structured interview was also use to get vital information from the respondents. Means score was used by the researcher for the data analysis. Findings from the analysis revealed that the university mostly employees Facebook and Twitter to communicate vital information about the university to students and the general publics. It also discovered that the corporate communication unit uses the social media platforms to solve other crisis problem confronting the students and admission seekers. It was further revealed that the university shares information on admission, academic news, seminar and conferences scholarships, and other information related to the university.

Keywords: Social media, corporate communication, communication, Usage, Public Relation

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized corporate communications in the university corporate strategies. Social media marketing allows the university and organization to communicate directly and instantly with their students, researcher and stakeholders, which is drastically a shift from the traditional one-way output of corporate communications, to an expanded

dialogue between university and its students as well as their customers. This paper aims to examine the synergy between social media and corporate communications, specifically focusing on the uses of social media for public relations in the universities and analyzing the changes that have occurred within the industry as a result of the application of social media tools.

It is imperative to state that in corporate space, the achievement of and the setback of any university or organization is central to public perception. According to Laura Matthews (2010), in today's corporate world, the success or failure of any company hinges on public perception. The opinions of key company stakeholders, such as shareholders, investors, consumers, employees or members of the community in which the organization is based, are all crucial to the long-term success of the company, and should be viewed as such by executives. Social media allows for corporate communications opportunities that a decade ago would not have been plausible.

Social media has transformed the field of corporate communications and the way it is practiced and possibly professional effects. universities use social media to share their news, messages, achievements, etc. instantly with all their stakeholders, students and the host community in which they are based. In other words, social media is used as an important tool for strategic corporate communication. The union of "communications and technology offers PR professionals the potential to mould their performance in a more strategic direction" (Breakenridge, 2012). Also, the emergence of social media has created a new style of communication pattern between a company and its customers, giving customers the potential to give instant feedback and ideas. E.g. students and customers can comment or post his opinion on the wall of a university Facebook fan page.

Universities in Nigeria and in other part of the world use social media channels like Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube for corporate communication to reach large number of people. According to 2009 Digital Readiness Report, "Public relations is leading the social media revolution inside organizations of all types and sizes." Again, the report stated, "PR leads marketing in the management of all social media communications channels; PR leads digital communications in 51% of organizations; PR is responsible for blogging at 49% of all organizations and is responsible for social networking at 48% of all organizations and PR is responsible for micro-blogging at 52% of all organizations." (Schwartzman, Smith, Spetner, & McDonald, 2009).

Regarding institutional use of SMT, Reuben's (2008) survey on social media usage among postsecondary institutions shows Facebook and YouTube profile creation and use was

reported by just over half of the 148 colleges and universities responding. However, in a more recent study of a proportional national sample of 456 four-year accredited U.S. institutions, 100% report using some form of social media, with Facebook (used by 98%) and Twitter (used by 84%) being the most prominent (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). The rarity of these studies is but one indication of the paucity of research on the extent of social media use at the institutional level.

Literature Review

The most popular social networking sites used for PR or corporate communications was LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube. (Macnamara, 2010) Donald K. Wright and Michelle D. Hinson's research study found that Facebook was more frequently (83%) used in public relations, followed by Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. (Wright & Hinson, 2010) Later, Wright and Hinson's longitudinal research between 2006 and 2014 on Social and Emerging Media Use in Public Relations Practice found "Twitter narrowly replacing Facebook for the first time as the most frequently accessed new medium for public relations activities. LinkedIn and YouTube were the next most frequently used sites." (Wright & Hinson, 2014)

Social media is a relatively recent innovation, and social media marketing is a comparatively new industry. Of the almost 900 survey respondents, most still had questions regarding the best tactics to use in social media marketing, how to measure the effectiveness of social media and where to begin with social media marketing (Stelzner, 2009). Eighty-eight percent of the practitioners surveyed in Stelzner's study reported using social media for marketing, but 72 percent of those have only been doing so for a few months or less. When measuring the time devoted to social media marketing efforts, 64 percent of respondents spend five or more hours weekly on social media, and 39 percent devote 10 or more hours each week. The number one advantage of social media, according to 81 percent of respondents, is getting more exposure for the company. This was followed by increased traffic and the formation of new business relationships. The practitioners surveyed in Stelzner's study reported using Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn and Facebook most frequently for social media marketing, and reported wanting to know more about social bookmarking sites (Stelzner, 2009).

The survey indicated that the longer a practitioner has been using social media, the more time he or she devotes to it per week. Another benefit of social media cited by more than half of respondents was a rise in search engine rankings. The study also examined some demographic information for social media marketers, and found that people between the ages of 30 and 39 are most likely to be using social media for marketing (Stelzner, 2009)

One exception to this use as a one-way communication tool is reflected in pedagogical use of SMT by faculty. Recent studies have investigated the use of blogs in academic disciplines including the sciences (Brownstein&Klein,2006); language learning (Ducate, Lomicka, & Lord, 2005); teacher education (Deng & Yuen, 2007; Loving, Schroeder, Kang, Shimek, & Herbert, 2007; Ray & Coulter, 2008); and business (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Faculty members have also created Facebook profiles to connect with their students in a more personable and informal space (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). This has further led to the use of Facebook groups for course offerings that previously used web-based forums for discussion (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Tweeting the function of a status update (tweets) by users of the Twitter platform has also found its place prominently in online courses as a discussion medium for faculty and students (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

Kaupins (1991) in the paper entitled, "Humour in University and Corporate Training: A Comparison of Trainer Perceptions" highlighted the concept of humour and its importance in the working ambience as well as in training domains so as to ensure the most productive ways of corporate communications establishing a very healthy and happy culture of work in any given organisation. Varey (1996) in the paper entitled, "Conscious corporate communication: A conceptual analysis" argues that the common perception of communication is something else what it matters in real practices. The author stresses that in order to achieve effective communications within organisation; it must be meticulously planned, well directed and careful executed. Moreover, the author provides a very comprehensive agenda that should be strictly adhered to in order to ensure effective communication.

Nixon and Helms (2002) in the paper entitled, "Corporate universities vs higher education institutions" emphasize that though corporate universities are not new still they have achieved incredible growth during the last decade. Moreover, the authors predict that corporate universities will outnumber traditional colleges and universities in the near future. The paper also provided possible reasons for the rapid growth of these typical institutions along with implications and challenges for both corporations and traditional universities.

Also, Ihator (2004) in the study entitled, "Corporate communication: reflections on twentieth century change" highlighted some principles of developments in corporate communications in this era and stated that communication between organizations and their publics in the advent of twenty first century has witnessed a dramatic change possibly due to a fast changing society, corporate values, information communication technology and other such important aspects concerned with the changing nature of society.

Again, Christensen (2002) in the study entitled, "Corporate communication: the challenge of transparency" stated that the organisation must set some ideals and policies to ensure effective communication and the policy and procedure of implementation of corporate communications ideas should be very transparent and open to execute for the better effectiveness of the organisation.

Communication and Corporate Governance Corporate governance has become a crucial issue in the agenda of executives and communication practitioners necessitated by developments in management including the increasing information demanded of organisations, sophisticated stakeholders and increased legal pressure (Sparkes, 2003; Cornelissen, 2012). Scholars agree that a mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its publics is key to organizational success and executives have to develop a management culture of service to different stakeholders (Sparkes, 2003; Cornelissen, 2004; Fombrun & Riel, 2007).

Money & Schepers (2007) pointed out a new corporate governance paradigm; from a shareholder based approach to a stakeholder-based approach. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that "corporate governance involves a set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders" (OECD, 2004). OECD focuses on the principles of good corporate governance that is transparency and the role of stakeholders. Beyond legal requirements in several countries, corporate governance refers to an engagement of managers with stakeholder groups (Barley, 2007). Recent happenings between Public Universities and their stakeholders in Kenya however point to a lack of favourable relations, communication and engagement with stakeholders.

Organizations are required to ensure; stakeholder mapping, a policy on management of stakeholder relationships, documentation of stakeholders' interests, expectations and their power to influence organizational operations and that reputation of organizations and linkage with stakeholders is a regular item of Board agenda (PSC & SCAC, 2015). Events in Kenyan Public Universities however, suggest a lack of awareness of stakeholders' environment and clear policy on and contribution of corporate communication as management tool for stakeholder relations.

Function of Corporate Communication

Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig (1998) identified a third role named the agency profile, since the set of activities seemed to be managerial in nature. It covered counseling; research; programming decisions; communicating with clients, peers and subordinates; handling

correspondence and phone calls and making media contacts. No technical activities featured in this role. Steyn (2000) concurred with these academics on the existence of the third role.

Steyn (2000) conceptualized and empirically verified three roles for the corporate communication practitioner as one; the strategist role at the top management level of an organisation which gathers strategic information on stakeholders and issues from the external environment by means of environmental scanning and feeds this strategic intelligence into the organisation's strategy formulation processes. This represents corporate communication's contribution to strategic decision making.

Dolphin (2000) in a historical study on directors of corporate communications in British organizations found that corporate communication has been an increasingly important function. However, little has been published on the role and function of corporate communication executives. Corporate communication literature identifies two predominant roles of the communication practitioner: the manager and the technician (Broom & Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1984; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Steyn, B., Mateboho, G. & Aské, G. 2001).

The source of responsibility and to whom the communication practitioner reports was also not clear. European practitioners were still struggling to attain positions of management in their organizations. Pincus, Rayfield, & Ohl, C.M. (1994) stated that perhaps to function effectively, the communications director should be aided by high visibility and status throughout the organization. Wright, (1995) stated that effective practitioners are those who are part of the management thus ensuring that the link with top management thinking is as close as possible because of their particular knowledge and skills.

University and Social Media Engagement.

In the light of the strategically important position universities occupy in society; universities owe it to themselves to implement a communications system that is "up to scratch-one that is professional and in step with the times. In such a competitive context, managing the brand of an institution and communicating its strategy requires very sophisticated management (Canals, 2013). Directors of Communications must devise the communications policy of the university or school and be involved in the creation of its brand, they must also be constantly aware of what's going on; as informed about the activities of students and faculty as they are about what the competition is up to; they must know as much about new communications trends as they do about the buzz

surrounding the institution (Canals, 2013). The Web opened up new frontiers for universities and colleges, giving them much more extensive options than they had before. But, at the same time, it has had a profound effect on the way they communicate (Jelassi, 2013). Social networks and diverse "communities" on the Web in particular will experience considerable growth.

In November 2007, Facebook created the fan pages' concept, which allows users to become a fan of any type of organization or course, and many universities jumped at the opportunity to create an official Facebook presence for their university. (Reuben, 2007 cited in Stageman & Berg 2013). Participation in two-way dialogue is one of the distinct features that differentiate social media sites from more traditional media. When social media content is successful, open dialogue between the university and current or prospective students is often the result (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; Mersham et al. 2009). In their case study of Marquette University's use of social media to engage with key stakeholders, Stageman & Berg (2013) report that it made sense for Marquette University to be involved with social media because:

- Good communication practice dictates that all methods are used to engage the universities' audiences wherever they are.
- There are already conversations about Marquette in social media, and their participation allows the university to lead the discussion that defines their brand.
- Social media was an innovative communication channel and allowed the communications office to position the university as an innovator among their peers.
- Social media gave the university the ability to interact directly with their audience and connect the audience with each other, which is key to building engagement.
- Social media allowed Marquette university to drive and harness the power of word of Mouth the buzz factor which is perceived as more credible and authentic than traditional marketing materials.

Lastly, in a work on "Social Media and the Evolution of Corporate Communications", Matthews highlighted, "How companies are responding to the social media revolution is an indicator of future success. Companies that are too slow to adopt these new technologies and practices are going to be left behind. Consumers are communicating with one another via social media, even if the companies that are their topics of discussion are late to join the social media game. Social media is going to continue to develop and change, and corporate communications practices are going to change with it. Social media has already proven an invaluable tool to the industry, and the future holds a wider teaching

and implementation of these tools. The advent of social media has resulted in the evolution of corporate communications.” (Matthews, 2010)

Objectives of the study

The paper aimed at examining the social media usage and corporate communication in Ignatius Ajuru university of Education. Specifically, the study objectives are stated as follows

1. What are the purposes of using social media in corporate communication by the university?
2. What types of messages are shared on social media sites by the university?
3. How frequently does the university post on social media sites?

Population and Sample Size

The population of the study comprises 8 information officers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education corporate communication unit. There are 8 staff working in the corporate communication unit of the university.

Research design

This paper adopted the interview and survey method to collect information and necessary data from corporate communication professionals in the university. Survey method helps in collecting the true responses from the participants as their confidentiality is assured. The survey method was followed by interview to gain more valuable insights into the area of research. However, closed ended questionnaire was prepared with minimum questions based on the research questions stated above. The questionnaires were administered face-to-face to a sample of corporate communication professionals in the university. The 8 questionnaires were filled and retrieved on the spot. Among the 8 staff that form the paper sample size, only the 3 professionals were randomly selected and interviewed. A percentage analysis was tabulated to infer the findings. The questionnaires were structured four likert scale with SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, SD= Strongly Disagree and D=Disagree.

Data Analysis

1. What are the most frequent social media handles use by the university corporate communication unit?

Table 1. The most frequent social media handles use by the university corporate communication unit

Social Media	SA	A	SD	D	N	FX	MEAN	DECISION
Facebook	7	1	0	-	8	31	3.8	Agreed
Twitter	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	Agreed
Youtube	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	Agreed
Instagram	2	2	-	4	8	18	2.2	Disagreed
LinkedIn	2	1	4	1	8	20	2.5	Agreed

Findings on the above table revealed that the university public relation unit mostly use Facebook to communication information about the university to its publics (\bar{x} =3.8), Twitter (\bar{x} =3.7), Youtube (\bar{x} =3.7) and finally LinkedIn (\bar{x} =2.5) which were all accepted and finally Instagram (\bar{x} =2.2) which was rejected. From the findings, the public relation of the university mostly uses Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to send messages to the students the university publics.

2. What are the purposes of using social media for corporate communication by the university?

Table 2 purposes of using social media for corporate communication by the university

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	MEAN	DECISION
To communicate with employees	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	Agreed
To communicate with the students	7	1	-	-	8	31	3.8	Agreed
For relationship with the general public	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	Agreed
For community relation	5	3	-	-	8	29	3.6	Agreed
Trade union relation	1	2	4	1	8	19	2.4	Disagreed
To communicate with university publics/customers	7	1	-	-	8	31	3.8	Agreed
To communicate with suppliers and distributors	1	1	3	3	8	16	2	Disagreed

From the above table, findings reveal that the university communication unit uses the social media to reach out to various set of people and for different purposes. From the findings, the university communication with via the social media to reach out to the employees of the university (\bar{x} =3.7), communicate with students (\bar{x} =3.8), to communicate with general public (\bar{x} =3.7), for community relation (\bar{x} =3.6) and to communicate with the university external publics/customer (\bar{x} =3.8) which are all above the mean criterion score and therefore were all accepted. However, it was also revealed that the university does not use the social to communicate with suppliers and distributors (\bar{x} =2) and also for purpose of trade union relation with mean score of (\bar{x} =2.4). The results were all below the mean criterion score therefore were rejected.

3. What types of messages are shared on social media sites by the university?

Table 3. Types of messages are shared on social media sites by the university

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	FX	MEAN	DECISION
Academic news	7	1	-	-	8	31	3.8	
Admission information	7	1	-	-	8	31	3.8	
Corporate social responsibility	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	
scholarships	5	3	-	-	8	29	3.6	
University promotional messages	5	2	-	-	8	29	3.6	
Invitation for Conferences and seminars	6	2	-	-	8	30	3.7	
Use social media for conveying other messages like career opportunities	5	3	-	-	8	29	3.6	

From the findings above, the university corporate communication unit communicate various types of message via the social media platforms to its publics. The messages mostly communicated are academic news, promotional messages, corporate social responsibility, scholarship, invitation for conferences and seminars, career opportunities and a host of others to the publics.

4. How frequently does the university post on social media sites?

Table 4. How frequently the university post on social media sites

Items	SA	A	SD	D	NO	FX	MEAN	DECISION
Regularly to update the university community	8	-	-	-	8	32	4.5	
Once in a day	-	-	7	1	8	15	1.8	
Once in two days	-	-	-	8	8	8	1	
Once in a week	-	-	6	2	8	14	1.7	
As soon as information that are public and university interest comes	7	1	-	-	8	29	3.6	

From the findings above, the public relation officers communicate information about the university regularly with a mean score ($\bar{x}=4.5$), and as soon as information that are public and university interest comes ($\bar{x}=3.6$) which are all above the mean criterion scores, therefore, result were accepted. Further findings reveal. that the corporate unit does not communicate once in a week ($\bar{x}=1.8$), once in two weeks ($\bar{x}=1$) and once in a week ($\bar{x}=1.7$). these results were all rejected as they fall below the mean criterion score.

Discussion

It is expedient to state that the university corporate communication unit actually use social media to reach out to the university community, customers, employees, and other stakeholders. On this note, social media platforms become a veritable tool in communicating messages from the university to the publics. The paper also revealed that the University mainly used Twitter and Facebook as its social media channels of communication. However, YouTube was the next most popular platform as respondents reported using this site to communicate with students and stakeholders in videos.

The University equally used social media to inform its stakeholders of key events taking place in the university such as exam dates, new semester dates, public lectures, and corporate social responsibility initiatives among others.

Further investigation during the interview, the web information personnel reveal that the university also employs the social media to avert various degree of crisis and other fraudulent act aimed at collecting money from admission seekers and old students of the university.

Findings from the interview reveal that Ignatius Ajuru University also uses social networking sites to compliment other traditional mode of communications such as the websites, newsletters, notice boards, television and radio: to her she opined that: not all the students and the university community stock them on the social media and therefore they still look forward to get information on the latest about the university from the traditional means of dissemination of information. Hence, those who cannot get the information from the social get theirs from the radio, newsletter, television, notice boards, and others. There are others who basically get information from the social media, therefore they keep every information about the university on the various social applicable to the university and the one mostly use by the students and the general public.

During the interview, it was also narrated that Ignatius Ajuru University Public Relations office understands the fact that social media can build or destroy a brand and thus when handling complains or negative feedback on social media, they do it responsibly with the image of the university at the forefront.

It was also noted that videos are mostly uploaded on YouTube through the assistance of the staff in the university Information and Communication Centre (ICT).

Conclusion

It is important to state that Social media is a great tool available for public relation officers to relate massively with any organization publics. Therefore, communication professionals should exploit this media for their corporate communication needs and campaigns. Social media campaigns can boost the image of the company in the sight of all the stakeholders. In India, since social media is still picking up; thus, a proper mix of the traditional media along with the social media adds to the ingredients of effective corporate communication. But the messages in social media has to be attractive, clear and crisp to gain maximum momentum and reach large number of online users.

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