

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF NASCO GROUP AND SOUTHERN FRIED CHICKEN IN JOS, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This study examines social media use in the public relations practice of NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken Company in Jos, Nigeria. It uses Excellence Theory and Relationship Management Theory and a mixed-methods design comprising 268 valid questionnaire responses and six semi-structured interviews. Facebook was the most frequently identified platform (32.8%), followed by Instagram (26.1%) and X (18.7%). Interaction occurred most commonly two to three times weekly (32.8%), while product or service updates and customer-engagement posts each accounted for 30.6% of content responses. A combined 56.7% rated social media as effective or very effective. Major constraints were difficulty creating engaging content (23.9%), limited digital skills (21.6%), high data costs or poor connectivity (19.4%), and low stakeholder engagement (19.4%). The findings show that social media supports visibility, interaction and reputation-related communication, but promotional communication receives greater attention than corporate social responsibility and sustained relationship-building.

Keywords: social media; public relations; digital public relations; stakeholder engagement; organisational communication; Nigeria

Introduction

Public relations has moved from a communication environment dominated by newspapers, radio, television, press releases and organised media events to one in which organisations can communicate directly with their publics through digital platforms. Traditional public relations relied heavily on one-way dissemination, which gave organisations substantial control over timing and message form but offered limited opportunity for immediate feedback. Social media altered this pattern by making rapid exchange, public response and ongoing interaction part of routine organisational communication. Digital channels therefore affect how organisations promote products, answer complaints, manage reputation and assess public reactions (Breakenridge 2012; Wright and Hinson 2017). The Nigerian communication environment has also experienced substantial digital expansion. Increased internet access and widespread mobile-phone use have enlarged the audience available to organisations through Facebook, Instagram, X, WhatsApp and YouTube. Michael (2024) reports that internet subscriptions in Nigeria increased from 106.4 million in September 2018 to 160.1 million in

September 2023. This expansion strengthens the practical importance of online communication for organisations that need timely channels for product information, customer support, corporate announcements, reputation management and public feedback.

For NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken Company in Jos, these developments have direct practical significance. NASCO Group operates in manufacturing and consumer goods, where communication with customers, distributors and the wider public can influence brand perception and product acceptance. Southern Fried Chicken operates in food service, where customer reviews, promotional messages, service complaints and visual product presentation can attract immediate public attention. Social media allows both organisations to communicate more quickly than traditional channels normally permit, while public comments and reviews make audience reactions visible to other users. Effective social media public relations requires more than maintaining accounts on popular platforms. Organisations must select suitable channels, publish relevant content, respond to audiences, monitor feedback and evaluate whether communication supports broader public relations objectives. Social media also creates difficulties connected with content production, professional skills, online criticism, misinformation, connectivity and the continuous demand for response. Ogbu (2019) argues that public relations practice in Nigeria benefits from adaptation to social media, but such adaptation requires purposeful methods and appropriate professional competence.

Research in Nigeria and other African settings confirms the growing relevance of social media to organisational communication, but the contexts studied differ considerably. Asemah (2015) examined the use of social media by public relations practitioners in Plateau State, while Gamage (2021) considered the Niger Delta Development Commission. Matyek et al. (2022) examined social media as a digital public relations tool among national and sub-national governments in Nigeria and reported broad account adoption alongside low levels of online participation. At a wider African level, Agozie and Nat (2025) show that organisational communication content and multimedia presentation can influence audience engagement, awareness and resource mobilisation. These studies establish the relevance of digital communication, but they do not directly explain how two private, consumer-facing organisations in Jos select platforms, organise routine public relations content, assess effectiveness and manage operational constraints. The present study addresses this local private-sector gap by combining survey evidence with interview accounts from organisational participants and customers. Against this background, the study assessed social media use in the public relations practice of NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken Company, Jos. It identified the social media platforms used for public relations activities, examined the nature and frequency of those activities, assessed the effectiveness of social media in achieving public relations goals, and identified the challenges that limit effective use. The study therefore considered social media both as a communication instrument and as a resource for developing organisation-public relationships.

Literature Review

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that allow users to create, share and respond to content while communicating with individuals, groups and organisations. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media in terms of internet applications associated with user-generated content and participatory communication. For public relations, this participatory character matters because publics can comment on organisational messages, share them with other users, question claims and communicate their own experiences. Social media therefore changes the direction, speed and visibility of organisational communication. Public relations concerns the planned management of communication and relationships between organisations and their publics. Grunig and Hunt (1984) connect public relations with organisational communication and relationships with publics, while Broom and Sha (2013) present public

relations as a management function concerned with mutually beneficial relationships. Digital public relations extends these activities through social media and other online channels. Breakenridge (2012) argues that digital communication requires practitioners to engage publics through conversation, monitoring and response instead of relying only on traditional publicity.

Social media platforms differ in their communication characteristics. Facebook supports text, images, video, comments and broad public interaction. Instagram places greater emphasis on visual presentation and short-form multimedia. X supports rapid updates and public conversation, while WhatsApp enables direct and group messaging. YouTube supports longer video communication. Organisations therefore need to relate platform selection to audience characteristics, communication purpose and the type of content that can be produced consistently. Combining several platforms can widen reach, but it also increases the demand for coordinated content and response.

Public relations practice on social media also depends on the nature and frequency of organisational communication. Regular posts can maintain visibility and provide repeated opportunities for interaction. Content may include product or service updates, event announcements, corporate social responsibility communication, responses to complaints, customer appreciation messages, polls and question-and-answer posts. Agozie and Nat (2025), in an Africa-focused study of organisational communication on social media, demonstrate the importance of communication content functions and multimedia presentation for engagement and awareness. For public relations, the value of frequent posting therefore depends on whether communication supports dialogue and relationship development instead of functioning mainly as repeated promotion. Ogbu (2019) similarly argues that social media can strengthen public relations practice in Nigeria when practitioners understand the changing communication environment and develop appropriate strategies.

Effectiveness in digital public relations may be considered through visibility, stakeholder engagement, responsiveness, reputation-related outcomes and the quality of organisation-public interaction. Wright and Hinson (2017) show that social and digital media have become established parts of public relations practice. Metrics such as reach, impressions, comments and direct messages provide evidence of attention and interaction, but public relations effectiveness also concerns longer-term trust, satisfaction and relationship quality. Thus, high engagement counts should be interpreted alongside evidence about audience perceptions and relationship outcomes.

Social media use also produces practical constraints. Digital communication requires creative content, platform knowledge, audience analysis and continuous attention. Poor connectivity and high data costs can interrupt posting schedules and response times, while limited skills can reduce effective use of analytics, scheduling tools and multimedia production. Negative comments can also spread quickly because online conversations remain visible to wider audiences. These conditions make content planning, staff competence, monitoring and timely response important to the quality of digital public relations practice (Asemah 2015; Ogbu 2019).

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Excellence Theory and Relationship Management Theory. Excellence Theory, associated with Grunig and colleagues, explains how public relations can contribute to organisational effectiveness through constructive relationships with strategic publics. Grunig (1992) connects excellent public relations with two-way communication,

management participation, ethical conduct and attention to stakeholder concerns. Applied to social media, the theory provides a basis for assessing whether organisational communication invites feedback and supports interaction or remains mainly one-directional and promotional. Relationship Management Theory places the organisation-public relationship at the centre of public relations. Ledingham (2003) argues that public relations can be understood as the management of relationships between organisations and publics. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) identify dimensions such as trust, openness, involvement, investment and commitment in organisation-public relationships. Social media has direct relevance to this perspective because comments, direct messages, replies, polls and other interactive functions allow organisations to respond to publics and maintain communication over time. For NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken, the theory supports assessment of whether social media communication contributes to meaningful interaction in addition to product promotion. Together, the two theories direct attention to communication quality, reciprocity and relationship outcomes. They also permit a strong promotional orientation to be interpreted as a limitation when it reduces space for corporate responsibility communication, listening and sustained dialogue. The theories therefore support examination of both the presence of social media in organisational communication and the relationship between its use and public relations objectives.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method research design, combining a questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews. The quantitative component gathered structured responses from public relations or marketing personnel, other employees and customers of NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken in Jos. The qualitative component provided additional accounts of platform selection, content practices, perceived effectiveness and operational challenges. This combination allowed numerical patterns to be interpreted alongside explanations supplied by participants. The study population comprised employees, public relations personnel and customers associated with NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken in Jos and was estimated at approximately 5,200 persons. A multistage sampling procedure was used. Purposive sampling first identified participants with direct involvement in, or exposure to, social media and public relations activities. Respondents were then grouped by organisational affiliation and role, after which stratified random selection was used to obtain representation from the relevant categories. Because the source study contains inconsistent figures for the intended sample and questionnaire distribution, this article reports the final analytical sample only and does not present an unsupported response-rate calculation. The quantitative analysis was based on 268 valid questionnaire responses: 62 respondents in public relations or marketing roles, 78 other employees and 128 customers or clients. The qualitative component used a semi-structured interview guide with six purposively selected participants, comprising four public relations or management personnel and two customers. The questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, platform use, interaction frequency, content type, perceived effectiveness and constraints, while the interviews explored platform choice, communication practices, evaluation and responses to operational challenges. Content, construct and face validity were addressed during instrument development through alignment with relevant literature and theoretical concepts and through expert review. The research documentation identifies Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher as the intended criterion for internal consistency, but it does not report the achieved coefficient; no numerical reliability coefficient is therefore claimed in this article. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while interview material was analysed thematically and used to clarify patterns found in the questionnaire data.

Results

The results are presented according to the study objectives. All quantitative tables use 268 respondents as the analytical base. Interview evidence is integrated after the relevant quantitative result to show how participants explained the observed patterns.

Social Media Platforms Used for Public Relations Activities

Facebook was the most frequently identified platform, accounting for 32.8% of responses. Instagram followed at 26.1%, while X accounted for 18.7%. WhatsApp and YouTube recorded lower proportions. The distribution indicates that the organisations concentrate their public relations activity on platforms that support broad reach, visual communication and direct interaction.

Table 1

Social media platforms used for public relations activities

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	88	32.8
Instagram	70	26.1
X (formerly Twitter)	50	18.7
YouTube	25	9.3
WhatsApp	28	10.4
Other	7	2.6
Total	268	100

Note. Field survey, 2025.

Interview responses supported this pattern. Participants explained that Facebook provides access to a broad audience, while Instagram supports visual communication and younger audiences. They also reported using engagement data, audience demographics and feedback trends when selecting platforms. This indicates that platform choice was connected to audience behaviour and measurable interaction instead of being entirely incidental.

Frequency and Nature of Social Media Public Relations Activities

Social media interaction occurred most commonly two to three times a week, reported by 32.8% of respondents. Daily interaction accounted for 26.9%, while 23.1% reported once-a-week interaction and 17.2% reported rare interaction. The pattern indicates regular but not uniformly intensive communication.

Table 2

Frequency of social media interaction for public relations

Frequency of interaction	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	72	26.9
2-3 times a week	88	32.8
Once a week	62	23.1
Rarely	46	17.2
Total	268	100

Note. Field survey, 2025.

Product or service updates and customer engagement posts were the two most common content categories, each accounting for 30.6% of responses. Event announcements accounted for 20.9%, while corporate social responsibility communication accounted for 17.9%. The distribution shows that promotional and interactive content received more attention than corporate social responsibility communication.

Table 3

Nature of public relations content posted on social media

Nature of content	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Product/service updates	82	30.6
Corporate social responsibility activities	48	17.9
Event announcements	56	20.9
Customer engagement posts	82	30.6
Total	268	100

Note. Field survey, 2025.

Interview participants described posts centred on product promotions, new arrivals, discounts, customer appreciation, polls and interactive questions. They reported that corporate social responsibility activities were posted less often and were more closely associated with major community events. Participants also stated that posting frequency could increase during product launches, campaigns and festive periods.

Effectiveness of Social Media in Achieving Public Relations Goals

A combined 56.7% of respondents rated social media as effective or very effective in achieving public relations goals. A further 23.1% were neutral, while 20.1% rated it ineffective or very ineffective. The majority assessment therefore supports a positive contribution, but the neutral and negative responses show that perceived benefits were not uniform.

Table 4

Perceived effectiveness of social media in achieving public relations goals

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very effective	68	25.4
Effective	84	31.3
Neutral	62	23.1
Ineffective	36	13.4
Very ineffective	18	6.7
Total	268	100

Note. Field survey, 2025.

Interview participants associated effectiveness with faster feedback, improved visibility, complaint management and measurable engagement. One participant explained: "Social media has transformed how we communicate with customers. Before, feedback took days through traditional channels, but now customers comment instantly. It has improved our visibility and allowed us to manage complaints in real time, which strengthens our brand reputation." Another participant described the evaluation process in the following terms: We measure effectiveness using engagement metrics such as reach, impressions, comment frequency, and direct messages. When we see increased interaction and positive feedback, we know the campaign is working." These accounts show that practitioners place substantial weight on observable digital metrics when evaluating public relations activity. They also show why engagement figures need to be interpreted alongside broader evidence about stakeholder trust, satisfaction and reputation.

Challenges Limiting Effective Social Media Public Relations

Difficulty in creating engaging content was the most frequently reported challenge at 23.9%, followed by limited digital skills at 21.6%. High data costs or poor internet connectivity and low stakeholder engagement each accounted for 19.4%. Other challenges accounted for 15.7%. These results show that both human-capacity and infrastructure-related factors affect regular and effective social media communication.

Table 5

Challenges limiting effective social media public relations

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Difficulty creating engaging content	64	23.9
Limited digital skills/knowledge	58	21.6
High cost of data/poor internet	52	19.4
Low stakeholder engagement	52	19.4
Other challenges	42	15.7
Total	268	100

Note. Field survey, 2025.

Interview evidence clarifies the practical meaning of these constraints. One participant stated: One of our biggest challenges is consistently creating creative and engaging content. Audiences get bored quickly, and trends change very fast. It requires skilled personnel and sometimes external designers, which can be costly.”A participant also connected infrastructure and reputation management :Internet connectivity and data costs also affect our ability to post consistently. Sometimes scheduled posts are delayed due to technical issues. Additionally, negative comments can escalate quickly if not handled properly.” Participants reported responses that included staff training, occasional outsourcing of content production, content calendars, scheduling tools and regular monitoring of comments. As one participant explained: We invest in staff training and sometimes outsource content creation to professionals. We also use content calendars and scheduling tools to maintain consistency. Monitoring comments regularly helps us respond quickly before issues escalate.”

Discussion

The dominance of Facebook and Instagram indicates that NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken favour platforms that combine audience reach with interactive and visual features. This finding is consistent with Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) account of social media as participatory communication and with Asemah's (2015) evidence that social media has become part of public relations practice in Plateau State. It also sits alongside Matyek et al. (2022), who found broad social media adoption in Nigerian government communication, although their institutional setting differs from the private consumer-facing organisations examined here. Interview participants in the present study added that audience demographics and engagement data influence platform choice, suggesting that channel selection is connected to audience behaviour and measurable interaction.

The comparatively low use of YouTube indicates that longer-form video communication occupies a smaller place in the two organisations' routine public relations activities. The data do not establish why this pattern occurs. Possible explanations include the resource demands associated with video production, the faster production cycle of image and text posts, or practitioner familiarity with other platforms. These explanations remain interpretive possibilities because the study did not directly test them.

The findings on content and frequency show communication that is regular but strongly promotional. Product or service updates and customer-engagement posts each accounted for 30.6%, while corporate social responsibility communication received the smallest proportion among the stated content categories. Customer-engagement posts provide opportunities for feedback and dialogue, which is consistent with the interactive orientation of Excellence Theory. However, the prominence of product-focused communication also shows that social media operates as an extension of marketing activity. Relationship Management Theory directs attention to trust, openness, involvement and satisfaction; an organisation that concentrates heavily on promotion may therefore underuse the relationship-building potential of social media. This interpretation also accords with Agozie and Nat's (2025) emphasis on

the functions and presentation of organisational social media content in shaping engagement and awareness.

The finding that 56.7% of respondents regarded social media as effective or very effective supports the view that digital platforms contribute positively to public relations goals. Interview evidence connects this assessment to speed of feedback, visibility, complaint response and measurable engagement. Wright and Hinson (2017) similarly show that social and digital media have become established instruments in public relations practice. However, 23.1% of respondents were neutral and 20.1% reported negative assessments. The result therefore supports moderate to high perceived effectiveness instead of universal effectiveness.

The organisations' reliance on reach, impressions, comments and direct messages provides useful evidence about attention and interaction, but these indicators do not fully measure relationship quality. Relationship Management Theory directs attention to trust, openness, involvement and commitment. Engagement analytics can therefore serve as one part of evaluation, while audience perception surveys and other feedback methods can assess whether communication improves confidence, satisfaction and reputation over time. This interpretation supports stronger measurement practices that connect digital activity to public relations outcomes instead of treating high interaction counts as sufficient evidence of success.

The challenge data show that digital public relations depends on communication skill as well as operating conditions. Content creation ranked first, followed by limited digital knowledge. This finding corresponds with Ogbu's (2019) argument that practitioners need appropriate strategies and competence for digital public relations. The interview accounts reinforce the quantitative pattern by describing the need for creative personnel, external support in some cases, training, scheduling and continuous monitoring.

High data costs and poor internet connectivity also affected communication. These factors can interrupt posting schedules and delay responses, reducing the immediacy that makes social media attractive for public relations. Low stakeholder engagement presents a related problem because organisational communication can remain one-directional when audiences do not respond. Taken together, the findings indicate that effective digital public relations depends on regular content, competent staff, reliable access and active audience interaction. NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken actively use social media as part of public relations practice, but their approach gives substantial attention to visibility and promotion. The findings support Excellence Theory and Relationship Management Theory in a qualified sense. Interactive posts, direct responses and engagement monitoring reflect two-way communication, while the lower emphasis on corporate social responsibility and the strong promotional orientation show that deeper relationship-focused communication can be strengthened. The study adds local empirical evidence from two private organisations in Jos to a Nigerian literature that has often examined broader professional populations or public-sector organisations.

Conclusion

The study assessed social media use in the public relations practice of NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken Company, Jos. Both organisations use several social media platforms, with Facebook and Instagram receiving the highest levels of reported use. Social media communication occurs regularly, particularly two to three times a week and daily, and the most common content consists of product or service updates and customer engagement posts. Most respondents considered social media effective in supporting public relations goals, especially visibility, stakeholder interaction and reputation-related communication. Interview participants also valued the speed of feedback and the ability to respond to complaints in real time. However, promotional communication receives more attention than

corporate social responsibility communication, which limits the extent to which social media is used for sustained relationship development beyond immediate marketing and engagement objectives. Content production difficulties, limited digital skills, high data costs, poor internet connectivity and low stakeholder engagement reduce effectiveness. The study therefore concludes that social media is an important public relations instrument for the two organisations, but effective use depends on consistent communication, stronger digital competence, relevant content, reliable infrastructure and deliberate two-way interaction.

Recommendations

NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken should evaluate the relevance and performance of the social media platforms they use for public relations and direct resources towards platforms that produce useful audience interaction. Evaluation should go beyond follower counts and include reach, response patterns, audience feedback and reputation-related indicators.

The organisations should use structured content calendars that balance product promotion with customer engagement, corporate social responsibility communication, organisational stories and other forms of relationship-focused content. A more balanced content pattern can support visibility while giving publics more opportunities to understand organisational values and community involvement.

The organisations should strengthen evaluation by combining engagement analytics with audience feedback mechanisms and periodic perception surveys. This approach can help public relations teams distinguish short-term attention from longer-term relationship and reputation outcomes.

Regular digital communication training should be provided for public relations and marketing personnel. Training should cover content planning, platform analytics, multimedia production, response management and online reputation monitoring. The organisations should also allocate adequate resources for content development, digital tools, internet access and timely response to stakeholder concerns.

8. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study was limited to Jos, Plateau State, and focused on NASCO Group and Southern Fried Chicken. The findings therefore describe the selected organisations and should not be automatically generalised to all Nigerian organisations or industries. The study also relied substantially on questionnaire and interview responses, which reflect participant perceptions. Direct access to internal social media analytics could have supplied additional evidence about reach, engagement and campaign performance. In addition, the source study contains inconsistent figures for the intended sample and questionnaire distribution; the present article therefore uses the verified analytical base of 268 valid responses throughout and does not calculate a response rate from the inconsistent distribution figures.

Future research may examine the long-term relationship between social media public relations, brand loyalty and customer retention. Comparative studies across industries and locations may also show how organisational size, audience composition and communication resources affect digital public relations. Further work may examine demographic differences in stakeholder perception and the use of new analytics and artificial-intelligence tools in public relations practice.

Ethics and consent statement

The research documentation specifies informed consent for the semi-structured interviews. The available documentation does not record a formal institutional ethics approval number; accordingly, no approval number is reported in this manuscript.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings are not publicly deposited. Requests for access should be directed to the corresponding author and will be considered subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional requirements.

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Conflict of interest statement

No competing interests are reported in the research documentation available for this article.

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