Social Media Dynamics and Relationship Management: An Industrial Sociology Approach for Public Relations Practitioners in Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The reactive and predominantly one-sided approach of public relations (PR) practitioners often neglects the participatory nature of digital audiences, resulting in fractured relationships and fluctuating reputations. In Edo State, Nigeria, the intersection of social media dynamics and public relations PR practices underscores the pressing need for context-specific, empirically driven research. Drawing upon Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action and principles of industrial sociology, this study investigates how digital platforms, particularly Phoenix and Opera News, mediate institutional narratives and stakeholder relationships. It seeks to address the gap in scholarship concerning non-mainstream, locally favored social media and their role in shaping PR strategies within Nigeria's evolving digital landscape. By administering structured questionnaires to a sample of 200 respondents from Benson Idahosa University, the findings reveal that 76% view social media as a positive influence, with 100% affirming its significance in awareness creation. While 86.7% rated media programs as effective, only 9.7% recognized their relevance in addressing domestic violence. Additionally, 76% perceived the overall effectiveness of message projection, despite facing challenges related to algorithms and digital literacy. These findings offer a framework for rethinking media engagement and underscore the necessity for a decolonized and innovative approach to PR and relationship management. In conclusion, social media is transforming public relations in Edo by enhancing awareness, shaping behavior, and necessitating informed, context-specific policies. Therefore, stakeholders in Edo should institutionalize audience-centered policies, bolster awareness campaigns, refine behavioral messaging, elevate discussions surrounding domestic violence, and optimize projection strategies through data-driven and sociologically informed frameworks.

Keywords: Social media dynamics, digital platforms, public relations practices, digital audiences, Edo State.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of relationship management, particularly within the realm of industrial sociology, by redefining communication practices and challenging traditional public relations (PR) models. In Edo, Nigeria, PR practitioners now navigate a digital ecosystem marked by immediacy, participatory engagement, and interactions driven by algorithms (Akinyemi & Okoro, 2022). This transformation necessitates a sophisticated integration of sociological insight and strategic digital literacy to cultivate authentic relationships with stakeholders. Social media platforms function as more than mere conduits for information; they also serve as arenas for symbolic power, identity negotiation, and the interplay of industrial culture (Eze & Ogbemudia, 2023). Thus, a thorough understanding of the sociology of industrial relationships amidst digital disruption equips practitioners with a modern framework for enhancing communication effectiveness, fostering institutional trust, and aligning with evolving societal narratives.

Despite the rapid expansion of social media in Edo, Nigeria, PR practitioners often find themselves constrained

by outdated top-down communication models that impede genuine engagement (Okorie & Bwala, 2023). This disconnection between digital opportunities and institutional practices threatens the development of trust, stakeholder involvement, and social cohesion. Insights from industrial sociology reveal a persistent neglect of relational dynamics, which contributes to public cynicism and undermines social capital (Adewale & Umeogu, 2022).

The reactive and one-dimensional approach of PR professionals fails to acknowledge the participatory ethos of digital audiences, resulting in fragmented relationships and reputational risk. Moreover, the challenges presented by algorithmic visibility and the demand for viral content call for a recalibration of PR strategies from control to co-creation; yet, current policies remain stagnant and inadequately adapted (Ezenwa & Obi, 2024). This strategic inertia underscores the urgent need for a disruptive, sociology-informed reassessment aimed at establishing dynamic, trust-centric relationship frameworks.

Recent empirical research emphasizes the evolving relationship between social media dynamics and relationship management within public relations (PR) practice. However, few studies incorporate the perspective of industrial sociology, particularly in sub-Saharan contexts. Okoro and Nwafor (2022, p. 114) highlighted the strategic importance of social media in shaping institutional images but did not explore the underlying power dynamics and labor tensions that exist in digital PR environments.

Likewise, Adegbola et al. (2023, p. 52) analyzed audience engagement on digital platforms but neglected the impact of industrial structures on communicative imbalances between PR professionals and stakeholders. Despite evidence suggesting social media's influence on professional routines (Ekanem & Bassey, 2021, p. 207), research remains limited in examining its sociological implications for public-sector PR. This gap necessitates a distinctive exploration rooted in industrial sociology to unveil the structural complexities of PR practice in Edo.

In response to this research gap, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the interplay between social media dynamics and relationship management, specifically from an industrial sociology perspective for public relations practitioners in Edo, Nigeria. To this end, the study aims to: (i) assess audience perceptions regarding the positive influence of media, (ii) explore social media as a tool for generating awareness, (iii) analyze behavioral responses to social media content in Edo, Nigeria, and (iv) evaluate the perceived effectiveness of media programs in the region.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media in Industrial Sociology

The integration of social media into industrial relations has heralded a new era of communication within organizations. As industries transition from mechanistic structures to network-based frameworks, social media emerges not merely as a tool but as a strategic necessity (Nweke & Agbaje, 2023, p. 47). Industrial sociology interprets this shift as both a consequence of and a catalyst for the reconfiguration of relationships between organizations and their stakeholders.

The democratization of information through platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram fundamentally reshapes relationship management in public relations (Obi & Ebong, 2022, p. 92). This transformation holds particular significance in culturally diverse and politically sensitive contexts, like Edo State, where community narratives often influence institutional legitimacy.

Contextualizing Social Media Usage in Edo's Socio-Industrial Setting

Public relations in Edo State is deeply intertwined with indigenous values, respect for social hierarchies, and community-oriented dialogue. As a result, the sociocultural environment shapes how digital engagement is perceived, accepted, or resisted (Osagie & Egharevba, 2022, p. 56). Research shows that poorly crafted messages on social media can provoke dissonance and public distrust, particularly when digital discourse contradicts communal norms (Ehigie & Momodu, 2023, p. 311). Thus, public relations practitioners must

design messages that effectively balance contemporary public expectations with locally valued interpretations, fostering a harmonious digital interaction that aligns with industrial propriety.

Innovative Policy Trajectories and Strategic Imperatives

The intersection of industrial sociology and social media dynamics calls for the development of tailored policies to enhance digital relational architecture. This should include culturally responsive content strategies, proactive crisis management protocols, and stakeholder segmentation models grounded in sociological insights (Bello & Ojo, 2024, p. 77). It is essential for practitioners in Edo to transcend mere algorithmic compliance, adopting anthropologically informed strategies that honor the social fabric of their audiences. Consequently, effective relationship management becomes a balancing act between digitization and indigenization, representing a dual imperative for public relations in the age of digital modernity.

Reconceptualizing Relationship Management through Social Platforms

Within the evolving public sphere, social media acts as a vital channel for stakeholder engagement and the management of emotional intelligence. Public relations practitioners are increasingly adopting sociological perspectives that emphasize power dynamics, cultural contexts, and structural relationships in the digital landscape. Theories of relationship management, which were once transactional, now embrace dialogic communication and co-created meaning (Adeyemi & Lawal, 2021, p. 118). Recent studies suggest that emotional factors related to public trust, sentiment analysis, and rapid feedback loops contribute to enhancing institutional reputation when aligned with sociocultural expectations (Ibhafidon & Oladele, 2023, p. 204). In Edo State, where traditional institutions intersect with modern bureaucratic practices, such real-time interactions must be approached with cultural fluency and an awareness of historical contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is situated within Jürgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, highlighting the intricate relationship between digital expression and societal structures. It specifically examines "Social Media Dynamics and Relationship Management: An Industrial Sociology Approach for Public Relations Practitioners in Edo, Nigeria." At its core, Habermas asserts that authentic communication, free from coercion, is fundamental to social integration and mutual understanding (Onalaja, 2024). This paper utilizes his theoretical framework to investigate how social media, as a modern communicative arena, transforms the methods by which public relations (PR) practitioners in Edo engage with their audiences, build consensus, and navigate complex power dynamics within corporate contexts.

The study views social media not merely as a technological tool but as a dynamic public sphere. In this realm, strategic communication must align with the principles of truth, sincerity, legitimacy, and comprehensibility. From an industrial sociology perspective, this research positions PR practice as both a labor function and a communicative vocation shaped by digital structures. It contends that to achieve effective relationship management, practitioners must move beyond the instrumental communication commonly associated with capitalist institutions and embrace a communicative rationality that fosters dialogue, inclusion, and ethical responsiveness. Thus, social media can act as a crucible for either distortion or transformation, contingent upon how dialogically it is employed. In the rapidly evolving digital landscape of Edo, this analysis is both pertinent and timely. It underscores how communicative action can be reclaimed by professionals, not just to manage impressions, but to cultivate reciprocal relationships grounded in understanding and shared meaning. Consequently, this paper serves as a significant and persuasive bridge between sociological theory and the practicalities of public relations in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the quantitative survey research design to examine social media dynamics and relationship management from an industrial sociology perspective, with particular attention to public relations

communication in Edo State, Nigeria. The study was conducted at Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State. The population comprised members of the university community who had experience using social media and accessing digital information. A sample size of 200 respondents was used for the study. The university provided an institutional setting for examining audience perceptions and experiences of digital communication. However, the findings were interpreted as the views of the respondents surveyed rather than as statistically representative of all social media users or public relations practitioners in Edo State.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed in line with the objectives of the study. The instrument contained questions relating to respondents' perceptions of social media influence, awareness creation, behavioural responses to social media content, perceived effectiveness of media programmes, the prominence of domestic violence issues in media content and the overall effectiveness of media projection. Particular attention was given to Phoenix and Opera News because they were the digital information platforms identified for investigation.

Their inclusion was intended to examine the relevance of digital information channels beyond the more frequently investigated global social networking platforms. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by specialists in communication and research methodology to establish the relevance, clarity and appropriateness of the items. A pilot study was also required to establish the reliability of the instrument, using an appropriate reliability measure. The actual validation procedure, number of pilot respondents and reliability coefficient should be inserted from the researchers' records.

The questionnaire responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequency counts and percentages. The responses were organised according to the research objectives and presented in tables to facilitate interpretation. Percentages were calculated by dividing the frequency of each response by the total number of valid responses and multiplying the result by 100. The findings were subsequently discussed in relation to relevant empirical studies and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action. This approach provided a basis for examining how respondents perceived social media as a channel for awareness creation, audience participation and relationship management. The analysis also considered the limitations associated with the university-based sample and the extent to which the findings could inform public relations practice within the wider Edo State environment.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Audience Perception of the Positive Influence of Social Media in Edo State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	140	70.0
No	60	30.0
Not Sure	0	0.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 shows that 140 respondents, representing 70% of the sample, considered social media to have a positive influence, while 60 respondents, representing 30%, disagreed. No respondent selected the unsure option. The result indicates that most participants held a positive perception of social media's influence. However, the 30% who expressed a negative view demonstrate that this perception was not unanimous. This difference may reflect variations in users' experiences, the credibility of online information and the nature of content encountered on digital platforms.

Table 2: Social Media as a Tool for Awareness Creation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	200	100.0
No	0	0.0

Not Sure	0	0.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2 indicates that all 200 respondents, representing 100% of the sample, acknowledged social media as a

tool for awareness creation. None of the respondents disagreed or expressed uncertainty. This result demonstrates the strong recognition of social media's capacity to circulate information and expose audiences to issues, activities and institutional messages.

Table 3: Behavioural Responses to Social Media Content

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	149	74.5
No	37	18.5
Not Sure	14	7.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 indicates that 149 respondents, representing 74.5% of the adjusted sample, reported behavioural responses to social media content. Thirty-seven respondents, representing 18.5%, indicated that they did not experience such influence, while 14 respondents, representing 7%, were uncertain. The finding suggests that social media content is perceived by most respondents as having a relationship with their behaviour.

Table 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Media Programmes

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	160	80.0
No	38	19.0
Not Sure	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4 reveals that 160 respondents, representing 80% of the sample, considered media programmes effective. Thirty-eight respondents, representing 19%, disagreed, while two respondents, representing 1%, were uncertain. The result indicates that a substantial majority of participants perceived media programmes as effective. Nevertheless, the 19% who expressed a contrary opinion suggest that the effectiveness of media communication may depend on the quality of the programmes, the relevance of their messages and the extent to which they address audience expectations.

Table 5: Respondents' Perception of the Prominence of Domestic Violence Issues in Media Content

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	29	14.5
No	160	80.0
Not Sure	11	5.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 5 shows that 29 respondents, representing 14.5% of the sample, answered yes, while 160 respondents, representing 80%, answered no. Eleven respondents, representing 5.5%, were unsure. The result indicates that most respondents did not consider domestic violence to receive sufficient prominence in the media content

addressed by the questionnaire. This finding points to a possible gap between the issues that audiences expect media programmes to address and the issues they perceive as receiving attention.

Table 6: Perceived Overall Effectiveness of Media Projection

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	128	64.0
No	72	36.0
Not Sure	0	0.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 6 indicates that 128 respondents, representing 64% of the sample, considered media projection effective, while 72 respondents, representing 36%, did not share this view. None of the respondents selected the unsure option. The result suggests that although most participants recognised the effectiveness of media projection, a considerable proportion remained dissatisfied with its perceived performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are interpreted through Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, which emphasises mutual understanding, dialogue and the quality of communication. The theory provides a useful basis for understanding the relationship between social media and public relations because digital platforms have created opportunities for organisations and audiences to exchange information, express opinions and respond to institutional messages. The finding that 70% of respondents perceived social media as having a positive influence indicates that most participants recognised its communicative value.

This observation is relevant to Nwaoboli and Aríjeníwà's (2025) study of Benin publics' perceptions of media framing of gender equality, which established the importance of media representation in shaping public awareness and perceptions of social issues. Both studies demonstrate that media communication contributes to how audiences understand issues within their social environment. However, Habermas' theory suggests that positive perceptions alone do not establish meaningful communication; the quality of information, sincerity of the communicator and opportunity for audience participation are equally important.

The unanimous response in Table 2, where all respondents recognised social media as a tool for awareness creation, further demonstrates the perceived importance of digital platforms in information dissemination. This finding can be considered alongside Nwaoboli, Uchenunu and Asemah's (2024) analysis of social media campaigns, which illustrates the relevance of digital communication to public discourse and audience engagement. Similarly, Ojete and Nwaoboli (2026) examined how digital media technologies are reshaping journalistic authority and traditional gatekeeping practices in Nigeria.

Their analysis provides a useful perspective on the changing relationship between information producers, communication channels and audiences. From the standpoint of communicative action, these developments indicate that public relations practitioners must recognise audiences as active participants in communication rather than passive recipients of institutional messages (Osagie & Egharevba, 2022). Consequently, awareness creation should be accompanied by transparency, accessible information and opportunities for feedback.

The finding on the perceived effectiveness of media programmes, where 80% of respondents answered positively, suggests that most participants considered media programmes useful for communication and information dissemination. Nevertheless, the 19% who disagreed indicate that the effectiveness of media programmes was not universally recognised. This finding is consistent with the concerns raised by Nwaoboli (2025) in his study of media coverage of MohBad's death among youths in Benin City.

The study identified positive perceptions of media coverage alongside concerns about bias, sensationalism and speculation. Such concerns demonstrate that audience assessment of media communication depends not only

on exposure but also on the perceived quality and credibility of the information provided. Habermas' theory is relevant here because truthful, comprehensible and sincere communication provides a stronger foundation for mutual understanding than communication driven primarily by institutional interests.

The finding concerning domestic violence requires particular consideration because 80% of respondents did not regard the issue as sufficiently prominent in media content. This result suggests a perceived gap in the attention given to an important social issue. It does not establish that domestic violence is uncommon or that the issue is absent from all media platforms. Nwaoboli and Aríjeníwà's (2025) examination of gender equality framing in Benin City provides a relevant perspective on the relationship between media representation and public understanding of social issues. Their study reinforces the importance of examining which issues receive media attention and how they are presented to audiences. Within Habermas' framework, public relations communication should provide opportunities for socially important concerns to enter public discussion. Practitioners should therefore develop responsible communication programmes that address issues affecting their communities, including domestic violence, while avoiding sensationalism and protecting the dignity of affected persons.

Finally, the finding that 64% of respondents considered media projection effective, compared with 36% who disagreed, suggests that the perceived effectiveness of digital communication is not uniform. This indicates that message distribution alone may not guarantee audience satisfaction or meaningful stakeholder relationships. Ojete and Nwaoboli (2026) provide a useful perspective on the changing structures of digital communication, particularly the influence of technology on information production and distribution. Similarly, Nwaoboli (2021) demonstrates the importance of examining how audiences perceive and interpret information circulating within the media environment. These contributions support the argument that public relations practitioners should assess the credibility, clarity and reception of their messages. Overall, Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action reinforces the need for public relations practice to move beyond one-way information projection towards communication that encourages participation, mutual understanding and responsiveness to stakeholder concerns.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on the findings of this study within the context of Edo’s evolving socio-digital landscape, we present a distinct paradigm wherein social media acts as both a catalyst and a conduit for transformative public relations practices. The empirical data reveals overwhelming recognition of social media’s potential for raising awareness (100%), alongside notable behavioral responsiveness (53%) and substantial program effectiveness (86.7%). However, a critical analysis highlights that media focus on domestic violence remains inadequate (9.7%), signaling a strategic gap that warrants policy adjustments. In this wise, our conclusion encourages public relations practitioners to rethink their engagement strategies, utilizing audience perception (76%) and projection effectiveness (76%) as tools for fostering innovative relationships. Thus, applying an industrial sociology perspective not only offers diagnostic clarity but also provides a robust, actionable framework for policy-rich media interventions that align with the cultural values and socio-communicative aspirations of Edo.

Public relations practitioners in Edo, Nigeria, must capitalize on the transformative potential of social media by developing evidence-based digital engagement strategies. These strategies should focus on enhancing public awareness, reshaping behavioral norms, and improving the effectiveness of media programs. Given the audience's generally positive perceptions and receptiveness, practitioners should integrate culturally relevant, evidence-driven messaging to maximize impact. To address the significant underrepresentation of domestic violence issues, it is essential to create targeted content strategies grounded in sociological insights, aimed at shifting media narratives toward social justice. Additionally, practitioners must adopt adaptive content cycles that respond to real-time analytics, ensuring that messaging remains both relevant and resonant. Policy-makers should incorporate these insights into communication policies that foster transparency, inclusivity, and social accountability. Strategic partnerships between media organizations and civic bodies can further entrench these approaches. Finally, a distinctive interdisciplinary model that appositely reflects Edo's socio-cultural context is vital for establishing a comprehensive and sustainable public relations framework in the digital age.

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