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An Assessment of the Expanding Channels of Public Relations and Advertising through a Mix of the Past and the Present: A Case of Some Brands in Nigeria

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1.1: Abstract
The growing technologies of communications are invariably expanding channels of Public Relations and Advertising. The channels are either moving from the old, traditional media that includes the print and the broadcast media, or are being complemented by the new media, made up of multiple online facilities, like Facebook, twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Youtube, Istagram, and emerging others. With different channels for messages and/or campaigns, Public Relation practitioners and Advertisers now arguably regularly have a surplus of outlets, through which information can be disseminated. The implication of this is that practitioners and direct advertisers are faced with hard and soft choices, sometimes determined by considerations for cost, and the need to maximize Public Relations and advertising effect, through its impact on the bottom-line. The paper also argues that despite the difficulties in comparing the efficiency of channels, practitioners are still able to prioritize channels for different, and ever shifting reasons. The paper then reasons that the continuing expansion of networks also translates into a possible growth of the creative ability of the practitioner.

1.2: INTRODUCTION

Public Relations is understood here as the deliberate and systematic dissemination of information for the purpose of portraying any organisation, or entity positively in the eyes of the public. It does not necessarily have to be paid for. It seeks to persuade, to propel a belief in the goodness of the organisation. Advertising is different from public relations because it involves awareness creation, with cost implication. The process of publicity, campaigns and promotions is paid for; unlike public relations that involves soliciting. The disciplines had expectedly earlier relied on the many different vents offered by the traditional media, like the Print. The print also had its different shades including the Daily Newspaper, The Weeklies, Monthlies, Quarterlies, and the periodicals. The last three could have Journals and newsletters as variants. Books could as well be included with texts, illustrations and pictorial representations as tools, just as in other print channels. Other than these print media, the broadcast media was initially important to Public Relations and Advertising. For Radio it could be Amplitude Modulation (AM), or Frequency Modulation (FM), Satellite Radio, or Satellite Broadcasting. Telephone was useful through its fixed and mobile modifications. So was Word of Mouth, as direct communication often requires. Television outlets offered Terrestrial version, Satellite broadcasting, and Outside broadcasting, for the systematic positive portrayal of an entity in the case of Public Relations, and for the achievement of the same aim through payments, as advertising largely entails.

With new media however, these channels have expanded, and are competing for the advertiser's attention and revenue through the platforms of Online Publications, Blogs, Skye, Face time, Google, Istagram, Linkedin, My Space, Picture, Youtube, Pinterest, and Video Sharing, Twitter, Whatsaspp, amongst others. The goal of this paper is to analyse how the new media has shaped the use of traditional media for Public Relations and Advertising, and the overall implications for communication.

1.3: METHODOLOGY

In doing this research, I observed over two weeks the Public Relations and Advertising preferences of some key companies in Nigeria, in the first half of June 2016. These companies include Dangote Cement, Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB), Diamond Bank, Standbic IBTC Bank, and Arik Airlines. I observed their patronage of online and offline media, and the number of Public Relation mentions they got from the outlets, and compared the frequency in each media type, as against the other. In my analyses, I did not differentiate between Advertising patronage, and Public Relations mention. The Advertisements came in form of paid publications, while the Public Relations mentions were in form of news stories, features article, or analyses on business pages, or even through photographs. I did not differentiate between Advertising and Public Relations appearances because the focus of my investigation basically sought to see how the channels for the two practices have expanded in the face of the growth of communications technologies, and because of the need to avoid complications in separating two similar fields, in a case where there is a commonality of purpose.

Offline media studied were Thisday, The Guardian, Vanguard, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Channels Television. The Online channels investigated included Saharareporters.com; Premiumtimes.com; thecableng.com; Lindaikeji; and nairaland. The study could be challenging in the sense that the times the

organisations were likely to advertise, or got mentioned vary from one firm to the other, just as they often may not advertise at the same time on the online and offline channels. Determining the best Public Relations and Advertising time was also complicated, which is why the time of my study may not necessarily be better, or worse than any other time. It was a randomly chosen period; just when the research hunch came. Again, the choice of channels was random, and not particularly because of any factor(s). But consideration was given to popularity of users' references, degree of traffic, as estimated by online sites like Alexa.com, and historical familiarity with the outlets. Regardless, the data from this investigation, through observations, analyses from secondary data, are expectantly worthy enough for analyses.

Other than this primary research is also the use of secondary data, arising from the spicing up of analyses with relevant literatures, and earlier studies on related subject matters. These secondary data were insightful, enriching and largely supportive of the primary information gathered.

2.1: RESULTS AND ANALYSES: THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING

Some tools have long being famous for being Public Relations and Advertising tools. For Public Relations, the common tools are newspaper publications, brochures and catalogues, business outings, events; community meetings/relations; employee relations and interactions; media relations and interactions; newsletters, journals, leaflets; press kits; press releases/statements; speaking engagements and outings; and sponsorships or partnerships. Advertising tools also include newspaper publications, billboard campaigns, Television and Radio campaigns. These items have grown in influence, leading theorists to classify some as Above –the-line (ATL), and others as Below-the-Line (BTL. Though the line between them have now being blurred through the dynamics in the evolution of communication channels, ATL are regarded as including Television, Radio, and Newspapers-essentially the old, traditional media. BTL includes channels like Direct Communication, and some aspects of online communication, which this paper will soon turn to.

The ATL media is notably more expensive, relative to the BTL. Importantly, the old traditional media had been what was naturally available to Public Relations and Advertising practitioners in the past. The scope of available media has however expanded, as this paper argues. They have been lengthened with the dawn of the new media, which embraces a better part of BTL media, and which converges all previous media of mass communication. Beyond the TV, Radio, Newspapers, Billboarding, Lampposts, and all other BTL media, we now not only have online and social media channels for Public Relations and Advertising, but also the ability to have all of them on a platform, online. Through the interactive ability of social media like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Istagram, Snapchat, and the rest, public relations and advertising practitioners can guide discussions and tune them to their lines of preference, beside populating the platforms with choice materials. Adding what the social media has offered to public relations and advertising to what was available before then, reveals an expanded space for the dissemination of public relations and advertising messages.

Fig.1. below is an instance of the presence of some brands in the old, traditional media. The Nigerian brands are Dangote, a multibillion dollar commodities trading company; Diamond Bank, Standbic IBTC, Guarantee Trust Bank; and Arik Air, a popular Nigerian privately owned airliner. The organisations were chosen in a random sample, to see the number of either public relations or advertising appearance they make in three newspapers,-*Thisday, Guardian, Vanguard*-, and in two TV stations-*Nigerian Television Authority (NTA),* and *Channels TV*. As seen, Dangote got mentioned 40 times over the two week period of study, Diamond Bank 32 times, Standbic IBTC Bank 24 times, Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB), 33 times and Arik Air, 23 times. These outings in the said media houses would probably have reached readers and viewers of the media organisations, to make the practitioner and advertiser feel some sense of delivery.

Before the revolution in communication, the audience reached through this media would have been seen as the maximum number reachable. But the revolution has ushered in new alternatives that add to the offerings of the old, traditional media, as Fig. 2 reveals. The new opportunity for additional platforms as reflected in Fig. 2 shows Dangote having 46 number exposures; Diamond Bank 26, Standbic IBTC 33, Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB), 28, and Arik Air, 22. When the exposure in the old, traditional media in Fig.1 is added to that of the new, online media in Fig.2, it gives the following: Dangote 86, Diamond Bank 58, Standbic IBTC 57, Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB), 61 and Arik Air 45, as seen in Fig. 3. What this basically translates to is the presence of a greater level of channel, the increased possibility to reach more audience, a higher chances of bigger reward for public relations and advertising, and a likely bigger impact on the bottomline.

OFFLINE MEDIA

	BRAND	THISDAY	GUARDIAN	VANGUARD	NTA(OFFLINE)	CHANNELS	TOTAL APPEARANCE
1	DANDOTE	9	8	7	8	9	40
2	DIAMOND BK	6	6	7	4	9	32
3	STANDBIC BK	2	2	10	6	4	24
4	G.T. BANK	5	6	5	9	8	33
5	ARIK AIR	4	7	5	4	3	23

FIG.1

ONLINE MEDIA

	BRAND	SAHARAREPORTERS.COM	PREMIUMTIMES.COM	THE CABLE.COM	LINDAIKEJI.COM	NAIRALAND	TOTAL APPEARANCE
1	DANDOTE	8	8	11	9	10	46
2	DIAMOND BK	2	4	5	4	11	26
3	STANDBIC BK	8	4	6	5	10	33
4	G.T. BANK	4	8	4	8	4	28
5	ARIK AIR	2	8	6	5	1	22

FIG. 2

TOTAL NUMBER OF APPEARANCES IN BOTH OFFLINE AND ONLINE MEDIA OVER THE TWO WEEK PERIOD OF STUDY

	BRAND	TOTAL APPEARANCE
1.	DANDOTE	86
2	DIAMOND BK	58
3	STANDBIC BK	57
4	G.T. BANK	61
5	ARIK AIR	45

FIG. 3

Melanie James argued that: "The terrain of public relations practice is also shifting with new media bringing about substantial increases in stakeholder strength through facilitating communication within stakeholder groups and between different stakeholder groups (Van der Merwe, Pitt & Abratt, 2005). Information 'pours out of digital spigots [sic]' (Stephens 2007, p. 35) and news now arrives 'astoundingly fast from an astounding number of directions' (Stephens 2007, p. 35) and it is often free. Anyone with a computer linked to the Internet has the ability to publish information for potential global consumption and it is clear that the internet 'is revolutionizing many aspects of public relations research and practice' (Taylor & Kent 2006, p. 145)" The author added: "The Internet gives public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues, and engage in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues (McAllister & Taylor, 2007)". What is being acknowledged here is the new power of public relations and advertising to share more information through more places, to control that information, and to get feedback on the information shared.

3.1: NEW MEDIA, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING: IMPLICATIONS OF AN EXPANDING CHANNEL

The organisations studied have by the above data being able to increased awareness, promote notifications and authentications, boost their contents, and increased photographic and image displays through the new media platforms, which has lengthened connection and conversation in communication processes. Significantly, therefore, there has been expansion of information delivery, discovery and sharing, while ideas, news posts, and link sharing have been further facilitated. Business contacts for the companies studied have as well been widened, which is also capable of elevating reputation in business, besides creating the opportunity for people to go to interest-specific sites.

Other than the above is the opportunity for increased brand exposure, greater insights into the market and more web traffic. These happens through a combination of using all the social media platforms, like for instance, Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, Blogs, Timbr, Foursquare, Istagram, Pinterest, and Google- all platforms where the companies were cited at one time or the other during the period of study. The platforms offer them twenty four hour accesses to information and to information dissemination. It is sleepless, timeless, and immediate, which eliminates delays, and encourages directs links to consumers, or customers, as the case may be.

Because of the multiple pages possible for uploading online, the companies are exposed to greater opportunities for creativity through a choice of how to populate their sites, number of pages to use and the kind of design to adopt. In the traditional media age, this choice was limited to available Public Relations and Advertising funds, and the number of pages provided by the platform for use. With the social media, the cost is now cheaper, with greater autonomy for the user, which invariably tasks their creativity, possibly revealing their ingenuity and exposes the possibilities of online transactions, as seen from their multiple online pages.

A greater caution is also seen to be taken by these brands in the dissemination of their information. More access seem to have called for greater responsibility, care and concern, in the release of multiple pages of information, the moderation and guiding of thought flows during exchanges, and in the presentation of facts and figures. The care is reflected in not just the rising number of appropriate personnel for the task, but in their improved quality, and expertise. This eventually leads to greater accountability to the public and an improved attention to their fears. A firm risks bad publicity in a case of faltering, in a world where a piece could go viral in a twinkle of an eye, literally. Firms are not just interested in a positive portrayal, but in the prevention of damaging representation, that could destroy months and years of effort at building a reputation.

With direct customer interaction, devoid of any intermediary like the Journalist, or as Public Relations agent could be, online platforms have created a straight link to the end-user. Before now, the journalist would mediate between the public relations entity and the consumer, through the possible publication, or airing of statements, releases and pronouncements that will positively represent the firm. The process was slightly delayed, because the statement had to be written, vetted, and dispatched to the journalist, who would then make a decision whether to use or not to use. And then he would think of the length to use; short or long? The placement of the publication would be thought of: should it be in the second page, back page, or one of the inside pages, or just where and even when? In a broadcast media, airing time would be decided. It is now possible to see that this process is time consuming, because the firm can simply flash news bits, pieces, and features on twitter handles, Facebook pages, on Istagram pages, and even video on You tube-all of which can be directly and instantaneously accessed by the end users. In this context, room is given for personalized or direct services, straight into the hands of the consumer through the smartphone, or palm top; or onto his desk through the laptop, or computer. In cases where only bits of it can be accessed, details might be available in some other platforms, or in the traditional media, which amplifies the scope of expression, as this paper seeks to prove.

There is now room for more Key Performance Index (KPI, and for more real time analysis. In having more KPI, performance can for instance be evaluated though engagement, while loyalty can as well be accessed. Reach is now measureable through responses, just as other intangibles like sentiments, emotions, and other feelings can be gauged. Performances relative to those of competitors may now be easily accessed as well, through the volume of impressions created on the online platforms, and through their share of voice on there. Ultimately, this might rub off on the bottomline, or profitability over time.

With sections for end users' comments, and the response inclination of the firms, a conversational atmosphere is created between companies and end-users, while information and files can be easily shared. This takes off the top-down, speech making, and seemingly dictatorial disposition of the old media that dish out information with relatively ineffective or delayed feedback mechanism. The online platforms give room for not necessarily a bottom-up approach, but to an equal ability to send and receive information between the public relations and advertising entity and the audience. Through this sending and receiving, back and forth channel, the consumer is able to get their choicest information, usually revolving around discounts and promotions, entertainment values, and multiple customer service needs.

New observations have severally shown that a growing number of people access news more on the social, digital media than they do through the physical media. Fewer and fewer number of people relies on newspapers and magazines. There is also a decline in reliance on the broadcast media like the television. The influence of the print is gradually being abolished, even though it is not totally extinct. What this implies is that the use of social media outlets by a public relations and advertising entity conforms to the age, evening up to the maximization of opportunities for exposure through diverse and dynamic channels.

The greater opportunity for brand loyalty is also in evidence with increased interactions through the social media. This is brought about by the confidence engendered by direct communications with clients, which runs over time, and then culminates in mutual assurance, acceptance, and ultimately loyalty. Related to this is the likelihood of the evolution of a long term audience, arising from the said loyalty. Loyalty implies some sense of commitment, which could also last over time. The loyal customers may as well grow to witness for the brand,

which may translate into converting new customers.

Jayson DeMers argues in support of the above thus: "Every post you make on a social media platform is an opportunity for customers to convert. When you build a following, you'll simultaneously have access to new customers, recent customers, and old customers, and you'll be able to interact with all of them. Every blog post, image, video, or comment you share is a chance for someone to react, and every reaction could lead to a site visit, and eventually a conversion. Not every interaction with your brand results in a conversion, but every positive interaction increases the likelihood of an eventual conversion. Even if your click-through rates are low, the sheer number of opportunities you have on social media is significant" (Accessed at: http://www.forbes.com/).

Point is the opportunity for conversion increases with multiple opportunities for brand expression on social media that is as well possible at a reduced cost. The traditional media are slightly more expensive, and sometimes more cumbersome. The new, social media is far less so. They are cheaper, accessible, affordable, autonomous, and user-friendly. They are on the spot. They are less procedural, with minimal deployment processes. This feature quickens the pace of use, even at lower cost, and amounts to little or no burdens on brands' recurrent expenditures.

Other benefits of the expansion of social media to brands include possible increased exposure to peers and/or competitors; the facilitation of bigger audience; bigger traffic to company's sites, and online accounts; the introduction of personal, human touch to brand relationship with customers; the encouragement of word of mouth campaigns, though not just likely voice interaction online, but by way of loyalists likely testifying to the brand quality; the provision of video and images accesses; the prospects of greater clients, and customer understandings; and the increased ability for *geotargeting*, and for audience segmentation.

4.1: NEW MEDIA, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ADVERTISING: THE DOWNSIDES OF THE EXPANDING CHANNELS

The expansion of outlets is not without its flaws though. Key amongst this is the operation of hackers, who can launch virus attacks, spam, worms, Trojans, just to achieve some sinister motive. They are known to have operated against different organisations, and have disrupted the structures of several companies, banks and corporations. Though none of this was reported in the companies' studied for this project, but their activities have been reported in many others, suggesting that any firm, or concern is actually open to such attacks. Like every other invention having its own challenge, online communication has come up with the activities of hackers as a major challenge.

Closely related to the above is the possibility of data and identity theft, meaning the theft of personal and confidential information of an individual, or company for criminal use. The identity is cloned, and then misused, or abused for the personal benefit of the thief. Multiple exposures online could reduce control system, and raises the chances of criminal invasion of privacies, violations of copyright laws, and even infringements on intellectual properties. Again, no case was reported for the companies investigated for this project, but there have been many incidents in several other outfits over time.

With the expansion of channels, mischief makers could also have had more chances of operating. This partly comes from the relative anonymity guaranteed online, which leads some people to do multiple, and cross posting of information. Some now also have outlets to say what they would never openly say, and can therefore be abusive, can curse, and make jests. Right or wrong allegations may fly, just as petitions, offensive materials, campaigning for a political, or other unrelated cause, and the circulation of even confidential documents. The license for this is provided by the shield of facelessness, which could characterize online posts.

The Research Pedia also argues that: "the use of company resources in these activities is quite substantial. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc. require a large bandwidth. Also, downloading pictures and videos streamed through these sites involves additional costs. Viruses and malware also pose a serious threat to the safety of the IT systems. Numerous applications available through Facebook are potential sources for these viruses. Multiple social networks, from Twitter and Google+ to Orkut and MySpace create an information overload that is difficult to manage. People juggling between these sites have trouble processing all the information making the whole exercise excessively taxing. A 2009 study by three Stanford University professors on cognitive control concluded that chronic media multi-taskers are more susceptible to distraction" (http://www.theresearchpedia.com. The argument here is that good as the network may seem, it is also problematic as shown in the foregoing.

4.1: CONCLUSION

This work has shown the expansion, through new communications technologies (particularly the social media) of media channels. The channels are a departure from the old traditional media, even if practitioners often combine methods, irrespective of their age. The study highlights the burgeoning spaces of public relations and advertising practice, through the social media, reasoning that this space is convoluted, intricate and still growing. The

growth often, however, creates some complexities that take experiences to the downsides, which eventually does not diminish the strengths, or benefits of the identified expansions. In essence, public relations and advertising is experiencing a new phase, involving the multiplication of channels and the opportunity to optimize their productive capacities.

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Dr. Abiodun Adeniyi graduated with a Second Class Upper Honours in Sociology from the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, after which he worked as a reporter and writer for The Guardian Newspapers, Nigeria, covering various beats in Lagos and Abuja, for more than a decade. He won the British Chevening Scholarship in 2003 to study International Communications at the University of Leeds, England and began his Ph.D. research immediately after his Master's Degree programme at the same University. He was awarded his doctorate degree in Communication Studies in 2008, for his research on Migrant Nigerians and the Online Mediation of Distance, Longing and Belonging.

Adeniyi returned to his native Nigeria in 2009, working as a Communications Consultant on the platform of the World Bank Economic Reform and Governance Project (ERGP) at the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), Presidency, Abuja. On expiration of the project, he became Lead Consultant at Witswords Consults Limited (WCL), Abuja, before joining Baze University as a senior lecturer in Mass Communication. He has been visiting professor of Communications and Multi-Media Design at the American University of Nigeria (AUN), Yola, and an external examiner at the National Open University, Lagos. Widely published, online and offline, in local and foreign journals, his present research interests are in the fields of public relations and advertising, strategic communications, media and governance, and media of diasporas, and especially on how these are facilitated online.