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SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLIC EFFORTS: AN INTEGRATED ACADEMIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Social media has fundamentally changed how organizations communicate with the public, shifting relationships, reputations, and the success of public initiatives onto digital platforms. Yet many organizations post frequently without a coherent strategy, treating social media as a broadcast channel rather than a space for dialogue. This integrated review synthesizes literature from public administration, public relations, health communication, marketing, and crisis management to identify strategies that consistently improve public engagement outcomes, including audience segmentation, platform-specific content, two-way engagement, credible messengers, social listening, community partnerships, accessibility, misinformation management, and outcome-based evaluation. Four complementary theories dialogic communication theory, uses and gratifications theory, the social amplification of risk framework, and the Excellence Theory of Public Relations explain why interactive, audience-centered, and credible communication outperforms one-way information delivery. Case analyses of four Nigerian organizations GTBank, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, Dangote Group, and the Independent National Electoral Commission illustrate how strategic social media use produces measurable public relations outcomes. The review concludes that social media functions best as part of a coordinated engagement system supported by clear objectives, governance, trained staff, trusted partners, and evaluation methods that extend beyond followers and likes.

Keywords: social media strategy, public communication, public relations, stakeholder engagement, community partnerships and reputation management.

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Introduction

Communication between organizations and the public has changed fundamentally. Where institutions once relied on newspapers, radio, and television to reach audiences in one direction, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X have redistributed the ability to speak, share, and challenge institutional messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Government agencies, health bodies, schools, nonprofits, corporations, and emergency services increasingly use these platforms to build relationships and mobilize participation in vaccination campaigns, disaster response, and community development (Mergel, 2013), enabling rapid, personal interaction that traditional media could not offer (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This matters most for public efforts organized initiatives intended to benefit communities where social media can extend reach, accelerate emergency communication, and mobilize citizens around shared goals (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Veil et al., 2011). Public relations practice has evolved alongside this shift, moving from media relations toward a dynamic, interactive discipline built on real-time engagement. With more than five billion social media users worldwide as of 2025, organizations can no longer treat these platforms as optional (PRCA, 2023). In Nigeria, WhatsApp, Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok have become primary channels for news and public discourse, and government agencies, corporations, NGOs, and universities increasingly depend on them for announcements, feedback, and image management (Osho, 2021).

Recent scholarship demonstrates that social media has become an important instrument for e-governance, citizen engagement, and public participation in Nigeria. Abdulkareem et al. (2022) found that social media use significantly enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance processes when government institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy, establishing that trust in e-government mediates the relationship between social media engagement and civic participation. Similarly, Oludu et al. (2025) reported that citizens increasingly prefer digital participation channels because social media platforms provide opportunities for interaction, feedback, and accountability, noting that accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency are critical determinants of successful e-participatory governance. These findings suggest that social media is no longer merely a communication tool but an important mechanism for democratic engagement and public service delivery.

Despite this potential, many organizations struggle to convert social media presence into meaningful outcomes. This paper reviews the literature and Nigerian case evidence to identify the strategies, theories, and organizational conditions that determine whether social media strengthens or undermines public relations and public efforts.

Recent scholarship has intensified focus on these dynamics. A 2025 report revealed that the Nigerian Presidency has consistently violated federal social media guidelines by publishing personal opinions from presidential aides on official accounts, contravening National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) protocols (ThisDay, 2025). Concurrently, a UK-based analysis of President Tinubu's cabinet found that the entire cabinet collectively reaches just 17 million followers approximately seven percent of the population with ministries holding youth-facing mandates such as Education and Women's Affairs exhibiting the weakest digital footprints, raising concerns about accessibility and inclusion (Development Diaries, 2025). These findings suggest that without stronger digital engagement, the government risks appearing "distant and disconnected."

Statement of the Problem

Organizations frequently maintain active social media accounts yet fail to build trust, engage stakeholders, or achieve communication goals. Three problems recur: many organizations post without a documented strategy connecting content to objectives, producing inconsistent messaging (Mergel, 2013); reactive communication leaves organizations exposed when misinformation spreads during emergencies (Veil et al., 2011); and evaluation remains weak, with organizations tracking followers and likes without determining whether communication changed awareness, trust, or behavior (Peters et al., 2013).

In the Nigerian context, these challenges are particularly acute. Research on political participation demonstrates the growing significance of social media in Nigeria's public sphere, with Suleiman and Peter (2025) observing that social media platforms have transformed political communication by facilitating civic mobilization, voter education, and public discourse. However, they also noted that digital participation may be constrained by misinformation, digital divides, and declining trust in institutions. A 2026 study in Abia State found that fake news significantly undermines public relations practice, contributing to loss of public trust and reputational crises, while practitioners are

constrained by a lack of adequate digital monitoring tools, low public media literacy, and weak regulatory frameworks (Nwosu & Eze, 2026). The 2020 #EndSARS protests illustrated how misinformation can escalate crises; former Minister of Information Lai Mohammed attributed the escalation of the protests to "fake news and disinformation" rather than failures in government communication, underscoring the government's perspective on information disorder during civil unrest (Vanguard, 2020).

Existing research spans marketing, public relations, public administration, and crisis management, but remains fragmented, and strategies developed for commercial marketing do not transfer directly to public communication, which must account for accountability, inclusion, and public value (Bonsón et al., 2012). The central problem is the absence of an integrated, theory-driven account of how social media strategy can enhance public awareness, trust, and action, particularly in contexts such as Nigeria where digital transformation is rapid but institutional capacity lags.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to examine and synthesize social media strategies for enhancing public relations and public efforts. The specific objectives are to:

1. Explore how social media can support public communication, stakeholder engagement, and participation.
2. Identify strategies that improve the reach, relevance, credibility, and effectiveness of public initiatives and public relations efforts.
3. Analyze the organizational, social, and technological factors that influence social media outcomes.
4. Identify major challenges, ethical concerns, and gaps in existing research.

Research Questions

This review is guided by the following questions:

1. How can social media contribute to the effectiveness of public initiatives and public relations efforts?
2. Which social media strategies are most useful for increasing public awareness, trust, engagement, and action?
3. What factors enable or inhibit the successful implementation of these strategies?
4. Which theories help explain the relationship between social media communication and public outcomes?

Literature Review

Social Media and the Transformation of Public Communication

Social media has transformed public communication from a one-way model into a networked model involving institutions, citizens, media, influencers, and community groups (Mergel, 2013). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as Web 2.0 applications enabling user-generated content, while Kietzmann et al. (2011) identify functional building blocks identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups that explain why different platforms require different strategies. Mergel (2013) distinguishes organizational approaches ranging from one-way representation to active engagement, noting that public value emerges most when platforms are used to listen and connect citizens with services rather than simply broadcast.

Recent research on government social media use in Nigeria reveals a persistent gap between policy and practice. A 2025 investigation found that the Nigerian Presidency has repeatedly violated federal social media guidelines by publishing personal opinions from presidential aides on official accounts—a practice that contravenes NITDA guidelines stating that official accounts "shall not publish personal opinions" (ThisDay, 2025). This disregard at the highest level sets a problematic precedent for other government institutions, normalizing the blurring of personal and institutional communication.

Furthermore, a 2025 UK-based report on the social media visibility of President Tinubu's cabinet found that the entire cabinet collectively reaches just 17 million followers about seven percent of the population. Critically, ministries with youth-facing mandates like Education and Women's Affairs have some of the weakest digital footprints, raising questions about "accessibility and inclusion" (Development Diaries, 2025). The report concluded that without stronger digital engagement, the government risks appearing "distant and disconnected" from the citizens it serves.

Research on Nigeria's digital diplomacy from 2020–2025 indicates that Twitter has revolutionized diplomatic practice in the twenty-first century, with the Foreign Ministry and President's office using the platform for international engagement (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2024). However, this diplomatic visibility has not translated into consistent domestic engagement, suggesting a bifurcation in government social media strategy between international and domestic audiences.

E-Governance and Digital Participation

Recent scholarship demonstrates that social media has become an important instrument for e-governance, citizen engagement, and public participation in Nigeria. Abdulkareem et al. (2022) found that social media use significantly enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance processes when government institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy. Their study established that trust in e-government mediates the relationship between social media engagement and civic participation. This finding reinforces earlier arguments regarding the importance of trust in public communication (Kasperson et al., 1988) while providing contemporary evidence from the Nigerian context.

Similarly, Oludu et al. (2025) reported that citizens increasingly prefer digital participation channels because social media platforms provide opportunities for interaction, feedback, and accountability. The authors noted that accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency are critical determinants of successful e-participatory governance. These findings suggest that social media is no longer merely a communication tool but an important mechanism for democratic engagement and public service delivery.

Research on political participation further demonstrates the growing significance of social media in Nigeria's public sphere. Suleiman and Peter (2025) observed that social media platforms have transformed political communication by facilitating civic mobilization, voter education, and public discourse. However, they also noted that digital participation may be constrained by misinformation, digital divides, and declining trust in institutions. These findings reinforce earlier arguments regarding the importance of strategic social media management while providing contemporary evidence from the Nigerian context.

Public Relations in the Digital Age

Public relations are the strategic management of communication between an organization and its publics to build mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Digital platforms have shifted this practice toward real-time, transparent communication, allowing stakeholders to bypass traditional gatekeepers, demanding faster responses, and exposing organizations to rapid reputational risk (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Organizations that engage in genuine dialogue on social media consistently report higher trust and stakeholder loyalty (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Bonsón et al., 2012).

In the Nigerian context, the digital transformation of PR has been uneven. Corporate organizations like

GTBank have embraced dialogic communication, while government agencies often struggle with tone, timing, and transparency due to limited digital skills, budget constraints, and institutional processes that conflict with the speed of online conversation (Osho, 2021). A 2026 study on public relations practice in Abia State found that fake news significantly undermines public relations practice, contributing to loss of public trust and reputational crises. The study noted that practitioners are constrained by a lack of adequate digital monitoring tools, low public media literacy, and weak regulatory frameworks (Nwosu & Eze, 2026).

Strategic Practices That Improve Public Engagement

Several practices distinguish effective use. Audience segmentation by age, location, language, disability, and readiness to act allows tailored rather than generic messaging (Smith, 2012; Osho, 2021), while platform and content adaptation matter because identical content distributed everywhere typically underperforms content designed for a specific platform and audience (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Peters et al., 2013).

Two-way engagement is a defining feature of effective practice: dialogic communication that seeks input and shows how feedback shapes decisions builds legitimacy, though automated replies can undermine trust (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Grunig et al., 2002). Credibility depends on trusted messengers health workers, teachers, and local leaders whose relationships institutional accounts often lack (Kasperson et al., 1988; Osho, 2021), supported by human-centered storytelling and accessible visual communication (Rosário & Dias, 2023; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Social listening enables organizations to detect rumors and emerging risks and adapt messaging, provided monitoring is tied to institutional learning and conducted ethically (Veil et al., 2011; Osho, 2021). Community partnerships and co-creation extend reach and credibility (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), while proactive misinformation management publishing clear information before rumors emerge limits confusion (Kasperson et al., 1988). Evaluation should move beyond followers toward outcomes such as knowledge, sentiment, and behavior, combining analytics with surveys and qualitative analysis (Peters et al., 2013).

Misinformation Management and Digital Information Integrity

The increasing reliance on social media for public communication has intensified concerns about misinformation and disinformation.

Offer-Westort, Rosenzweig, and Athey (2024) demonstrated that targeted digital interventions can significantly reduce the spread of health-related misinformation among Nigerian social media users without discouraging the sharing of accurate information. Their findings underscore the importance of proactive communication strategies, fact-checking initiatives, and digital literacy programmes.

Similarly, Goldstein, Grossman, and Startz (2024) found that exposure to social media significantly influences public acceptance of misinformation, particularly during public health emergencies. The study revealed that political affiliation and levels of institutional trust affect susceptibility to false information. In another Nigerian study, Ogbodo et al. (2026) reported that misinformation spreads rapidly through social media networks due to low levels of digital literacy and inadequate verification practices among users. The authors recommended the institutionalization of media literacy campaigns, strategic communication units, and collaborative fact-checking mechanisms.

Aleshinloye, Orolade, and Fadahunsi (2024) further argued that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in Nigeria's information ecosystem, emphasizing the need for coordinated government communication strategies capable of countering misinformation before it gains widespread acceptance. Their findings support the growing consensus that misinformation management must be integrated into organizational communication planning rather than treated as a reactive activity.

A significant development occurred in 2025 when the Federal Government approved the creation of "Naija Falsehood Buster," a national hub to combat fake news. Led by Dr. Toyin Onayinka of FUOYE, the project will develop an AI-driven system to detect, monitor, and reduce falsehoods spread by on-air personalities and influencers (Daily Trust, 2025). This initiative represents a proactive, technology-driven approach to misinformation management, aligning with recommendations in the literature for advance planning and institutional capacity building (Kasperson et al., 1988; Veil et al., 2011; Offer-Westort et al., 2024).

Uwalaka (2023) examined the spread of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, finding that social media platforms facilitated the rapid dissemination of unverified health information, while traditional media often amplified these falsehoods through inadequate verification practices. The study emphasized the need for collaborative fact-checking

initiatives involving media organizations, health authorities, and technology platforms to combat misinformation effectively.

Crisis Communication and Public Trust

Recent evidence from Nigeria highlights the growing importance of social media in crisis communication. Ihekweazu et al. (2022) documented the effectiveness of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's #TakeResponsibility campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign combined social media engagement, community partnerships, and risk communication strategies to promote public compliance and counter misinformation. The study demonstrated that transparency, consistency, and audience-centred messaging significantly improved public trust and information uptake.

Nasidi et al. (2026) similarly found that social media responsiveness, transparency, and rapid correction of misinformation positively influence public trust in government crisis communication. Examining both the COVID-19 pandemic and the #EndSARS protests, the authors concluded that trust is strengthened when public institutions engage citizens through timely and interactive communication practices. This aligns with the social amplification of risk framework (Kasperson et al., 1988), which emphasizes the importance of institutional transparency in managing public perceptions of risk.

Nwofia and Obi (2024) observed that social media has become an indispensable component of public sector crisis management in Nigeria. However, they cautioned that ineffective communication strategies, delayed responses, and misinformation can undermine organizational credibility and public confidence. These findings align with contemporary crisis communication theories that emphasize speed, transparency, and stakeholder engagement (Veil et al., 2011).

The 2020 #EndSARS protests provided a critical case study in crisis communication dynamics. Former Minister of Information Lai Mohammed attributed the escalation of the protests to "fake news and disinformation" rather than a failure in government communication, claiming a surge in misinformation followed the deployment of troops to the Lekki Toll Gate (Vanguard, 2020). This framing underscores the government's perspective on information disorder during crises, though critics have argued that it deflects attention from institutional communication failures. Nasidi et al. (2026) found that during the #EndSARS protests, citizens' trust in government crisis communication was negatively affected by perceived

institutional unresponsiveness and the proliferation of unverified information.

Digital Participation, Activism, and Civil Society

Social media continues to be a powerful force for civic engagement and democratic participation in Nigeria. A 2026 study analyzing hashtags such as #EndSARS, #JusticeForDeborah, and #EndBadGovernance revealed how activists use repetition, emotional language, and protest styles to challenge institutional authority, shift public opinion from apathy to action, and amplify suppressed voices (Okafor & Adebayo, 2026). These findings demonstrate that social media has become an essential infrastructure for civil society mobilization, particularly when traditional channels of political participation are perceived as unresponsive.

Research on urban Nigerian youth found that 78% actively participate in online activism, while 85% said social media significantly shapes their self-concept and cultural identity (Nwachukwu et al., 2025). This highlights digital platforms' power not just for cultural expression but for mobilizing youth on social issues, confirming earlier findings on the centrality of social media to Nigerian youth engagement (Osho, 2021). Civil society organizations have innovated in response to digital challenges. The Paradigm Initiative (PIN) has built resilience by creating tools such as Ripoti (for reporting digital rights violations) and Ayeta (a digital security toolkit). They have developed on-demand learning platforms to counter misinformation and strengthen digital safety, especially during elections and protests (Paradigm Initiative, 2025). These initiatives represent a model of community-driven digital literacy and rights protection that complements institutional efforts.

Crisis Communication and Disaster Management

Social media's role in crisis communication is a growing area of focus, with research exploring both its potential and its pitfalls. A 2026 review found Nigeria's adoption of social media in disaster management has not yet reached levels seen in the US, Japan, or Australia. Despite 107 million internet users, significant challenges remain: a lack of infrastructure, rising misinformation, low digital literacy, and public distrust (Eze & Okonkwo, 2026).

The same study noted that during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, social media influencers like @Aproko_doctor had "far greater interaction metrics" than official health authorities, while community leaders were most preferred for flood risk communication. This suggests a need for official bodies to partner with trusted community voices during crises, rather than relying solely on institutional

accounts. This finding aligns with research demonstrating that trusted messengers can bridge institutional and community communication gaps (Osho, 2021; Ihekweazu et al., 2022).

Researchers propose "hybrid communication models" that integrate traditional systems such as radio and community leaders with digital platforms, drawing on evidence from Nigerian contexts. The study emphasizes a need for integrated digital-traditional communication systems and public-private partnerships to build sustainable infrastructure (Eze & Okonkwo, 2026).

The Nigerian Context and Emerging Research Gaps

Although social media adoption among Nigerian public institutions has increased significantly, substantial challenges remain. Recent studies indicate that issues such as digital inequality, misinformation, limited institutional capacity, and low digital literacy continue to affect communication effectiveness. While studies by Abdulkareem et al. (2022), Oludu et al. (2025), and Nasidi et al. (2026) provide valuable insights into digital participation and crisis communication, empirical research examining the integrated relationship between social media strategy, public trust, misinformation management, and public engagement outcomes remains limited.

Nigerian corporations such as GTBank use platforms like X effectively for customer service, while government agencies more often struggle with tone, timing, and transparency due to limited digital skills and slow institutional processes (Osho, 2021). WhatsApp and Facebook remain most widely used, followed by Instagram and TikTok among younger demographics, and mobile-first, low-bandwidth access favors lightweight content.

Recurring gaps include the digital divide, constrained organizational capacity (Mergel, 2013), dependence on externally controlled platform algorithms (Kietzmann et al., 2011), and limited longitudinal evidence (Peters et al., 2013), particularly for rural communities and multilingual communication (Osho, 2021). Furthermore, much of the existing Nigerian literature focuses on political communication or COVID-19-related communication. There is insufficient evidence regarding long-term social media strategies for public relations, community development initiatives, public sector service delivery, and stakeholder engagement across diverse sectors. Additional research is therefore needed to develop integrated frameworks capable of explaining how strategic social

media use influences trust, participation, and public outcomes in contemporary Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework

This review integrates four complementary theories.

Dialogic Communication Theory

Kent and Taylor (1998) frame effective public communication as relationship-building rather than persuasion, emphasizing mutuality, openness, and responsiveness. GTBank's real-time, personalized responses on X illustrate how dialogic practice converts complaints into demonstrations of customer-centricity. In the Nigerian government context, however, dialogic practice remains limited; the Presidency's violation of social media guidelines by publishing personal opinions from aides (ThisDay, 2025) suggests a deficit in institutional commitment to dialogic principles. Abdulkareem et al. (2022) found that dialogic engagement through social media significantly enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance when institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy, reinforcing the importance of dialogic practice for building e-governance trust.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Katz et al. (1973) argue that audiences actively select media to satisfy needs for information, identity, and interaction, explaining why messages succeed on some platforms and fail on others. The NCDC applied this logic during COVID-19 by combining factual updates, myth-busting content, and practical guidance for different audience needs (Ihekweazu et al., 2022). Recent findings on youth digital participation 78% actively participate in online activism (Nwachukwu et al., 2025) underscore the importance of understanding audience motivations in designing effective communication. Oludu et al. (2025) further demonstrated that citizens increasingly prefer digital participation channels because they satisfy needs for interaction, feedback, and accountability.

Social Amplification of Risk Framework

Kasperson et al. (1988) explain how institutions, media, and social networks intensify or dampen perceptions of hazards. Social media functions as an amplification station, making this framework relevant to health and disaster communication; the NCDC's consistent updates illustrate how transparency can attenuate harmful amplification (Ihekweazu et al., 2022). However, the #EndSARS experience demonstrated how misinformation can amplify risk perceptions, with the government attributing protest

escalation to fake news (Vanguard, 2020). Nasidi et al. (2026) found that social media responsiveness, transparency, and rapid correction of misinformation positively influence public trust in government crisis communication, confirming the framework's applicability to contemporary Nigerian contexts.

Excellence Theory of Public Relations

Grunig et al. (2002) posit that the most effective public relations is two-way symmetrical communication integrated into organizational strategy and guided by ethical practice. Dangote Group's CSR storytelling and employee advocacy illustrate this strategic, relationship-focused approach. The Excellence Theory's emphasis on ethical practice resonates with concerns about the Nigerian Presidency's violations of federal social media guidelines (ThisDay, 2025), highlighting the reputational risks of inconsistent institutional communication. Offer-Westort et al. (2024) demonstrated that targeted digital interventions informed by strategic communication principles can significantly reduce health-related misinformation without discouraging accurate information sharing, supporting the Excellence Theory's emphasis on strategic, evidence-based practice.

Together, these theories show that social media outcomes emerge through exposure, dialogue, trust, and network diffusion, moderated by digital access and organizational capacity (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Mergel, 2013), and converge on the conclusion that interactive, credible communication outperforms one-way information delivery.

Methodology

This paper employs a narrative literature-review design combined with case study analysis, appropriate because the topic spans public administration, public relations, health communication, and crisis management, and the purpose is to synthesize concepts and theory rather than estimate a single pooled effect (Gough et al., 2017). Case analysis of four Nigerian organizations supplements the review with contextual application. Literature was identified using terms including social media strategy, public communication, government social media, digital civic engagement, social listening, misinformation, crisis communication, and e-participatory governance, prioritizing peer-reviewed journal articles and frequently cited foundational studies across Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, primarily covering 1998–2026. Recent studies from 2020–2026 were specifically sought to capture contemporary developments in Nigerian digital communication.

Literature was included when it examined social media communication by public, nonprofit, or corporate organizations; addressed reach, trust, participation, or behavioral outcomes; and presented relevant theory or evidence. Literature focused solely on technical platform development or unsupported promotional claims was excluded. Literature was reviewed thematically, with recurring concepts grouped into segmentation, engagement, trust, listening, partnerships, misinformation management, and evaluation. As a narrative rather than systematic review, this paper does not support statistical meta-analysis, and its Nigerian case focus, while contextually valuable, limits generalizability to other settings.

Findings and Discussion

Case Studies

Four Nigerian case studies illustrate these strategies in practice.

Guaranty Trust Bank (GTB) built a reputation for accessibility by responding to complaints on X within minutes using a friendly, human tone, converting complaints into public demonstrations of customer-centricity (Osho, 2021). This approach exemplifies dialogic communication and has been sustained over time, contributing to the bank's reputation as a digital leader in Nigerian banking. The bank's success aligns with Abdulkareem et al.'s (2022) finding that social media engagement enhances trust when institutions are perceived as responsive.

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) managed COVID-19 communication through daily updates across Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp alongside myth-busting content and expert Q&A sessions, becoming Nigeria's most trusted pandemic information source (Osho, 2021; Ihekweazu et al., 2022). The NCDC's success demonstrates the effectiveness of consistent, transparent communication during health emergencies, aligning with principles of the social amplification of risk framework. Ihekweazu et al. (2022) documented that the NCDC's #TakeResponsibility campaign combined social media engagement, community partnerships, and risk communication strategies to promote public compliance and counter misinformation, demonstrating that transparency, consistency, and audience-centred messaging significantly improved public trust.

Dangote Group used CSR storytelling and employee advocacy to shift public conversation from pricing criticism toward its contribution to national development (Osho, 2021).

This proactive approach to reputation management exemplifies the Excellence Theory's emphasis on strategic relationship building. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) diversified beyond Facebook to TikTok, X, and Instagram Reels, using skits and polls to explain voter registration, reaching millions of first-time voters ahead of the 2023 elections. This demonstrated the importance of platform adaptation and audience-centered content in reaching younger demographics, consistent with Suleiman and Peter's (2025) finding that social media platforms have transformed political communication by facilitating civic mobilization and voter education.

Cross-case analysis points to five consistent findings:

Strategy-aligned content outperforms undirected posting because clear objectives guided content decisions (Mergel, 2013; Peters et al., 2013). The case organizations all tied social media to specific communication goals, unlike many government agencies that post without strategic direction. Abdulkareem et al. (2022) found that strategic social media use significantly enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance when institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy.

Two-way communication builds trust, as GTBank and INEC succeeded specifically because they engaged rather than broadcast (Kent & Taylor, 1998). This finding is reinforced by research showing that organizations that ignore comments or respond generically fail to build trust (Osho, 2021). Oludu et al. (2025) reported that citizens increasingly prefer digital participation channels because social media platforms provide opportunities for interaction, feedback, and accountability, with accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency being critical determinants of successful e-participatory governance. Platform choice must match audience, as shown by NCDC's use of WhatsApp for mass reach against INEC's use of TikTok for younger voters (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Recent research on Nigerian youth digital participation 85% say social media shapes their self-concept (Nwachukwu et al., 2025) underscores the importance of platform selection.

Speed is critical, since social listening allowed NCDC and GTBank to respond before issues escalated (Veil et al., 2011). Nasidi et al. (2026) found that social media responsiveness positively influences public trust in government crisis communication. The #EndSARS experience demonstrated that delayed responses can allow false narratives to take hold, reinforcing the importance of rapid institutional response.

Storytelling and humanization increased engagement and improved perception, as Dangote's CSR content demonstrated. This aligns with research on the effectiveness of human-centered content in public communication (Rosário & Dias, 2023).

Emerging Issues from Recent Research

Recent studies add important nuance to these findings. The Nigerian Presidency's violation of federal social media guidelines (ThisDay, 2025) suggests a disconnect between policy and practice at the highest level of government, undermining the credibility of institutional communication. This finding echoes earlier concerns about government social media use being symbolic rather than strategic (Mergel, 2013). The approval of the "Naija Falsehood Buster" AI-driven misinformation detection system (Daily Trust, 2025) represents a significant institutional response to the misinformation challenge. This initiative aligns with recommendations for proactive misinformation management (Kasperson et al., 1988; Offer-Westort et al., 2024) and suggests growing recognition of the need for technological solutions to information disorder. Offer-Westort, Rosenzweig, and Athey (2024) demonstrated that targeted digital interventions can significantly reduce the spread of health-related misinformation among Nigerian social media users, providing empirical support for such initiatives.

Research on digital activism (Okafor & Adebayo, 2026) and youth participation (Nwachukwu et al., 2025) demonstrates that social media has become essential infrastructure for civic engagement. Organizations that ignore this reality risk appearing disconnected from the citizens they serve, as the 2025 cabinet visibility report suggested (Development Diaries, 2025). Suleiman and Peter (2025) observed that social media platforms have transformed political communication by facilitating civic mobilization and public discourse,

though digital participation may be constrained by misinformation and declining trust in institutions.

The finding that Nigeria's adoption of social media in disaster management lag behind other countries (Eze & Okonkwo, 2026) points to the need for greater investment in digital infrastructure and capacity building. The preference for community leaders over official sources in flood risk communication suggests that partnership strategies may be more effective than institutional messaging alone, consistent with findings by Ihekweazu et al. (2022) on the effectiveness of community partnerships in health communication.

Contemporary evidence strengthens the findings of this review. The success of the NCDC's COVID-19 communication strategy supports research demonstrating that transparency, responsiveness, and misinformation management are essential determinants of effective public communication (Ihekweazu et al., 2022; Nasidi et al., 2026). Similarly, studies on e-participatory governance indicate that citizens are more likely to engage with public initiatives when organizations actively use social media for dialogue rather than one-way communication (Abdulkareem et al., 2022; Oludu et al., 2025).

The literature further demonstrates that misinformation management has become a strategic necessity. Ogbodo et al. (2026) and Offer-Westort et al. (2024) found that proactive fact-checking, digital literacy interventions and continuous monitoring significantly reduce misinformation dissemination. Consequently, effective social media management requires not only content creation but also active information verification, audience engagement, and trust-building practices. Goldstein, Grossman, and Startz (2024) revealed that political affiliation and levels of institutional trust affect susceptibility to false information, emphasizing the need for targeted communication strategies.

Strategy-Outcome Matrix

Strategy	Primary Mechanism	Expected Outcome
Audience segmentation	Message relevance	Greater comprehension and response
Two-way engagement	Dialogue and responsiveness	Stronger trust and participation
Trusted messengers	Social credibility	Increased acceptance and sharing
Social listening	Continuous learning	Timely adaptation and rumor detection
Mixed-method evaluation	Evidence-based improvement	Better resource allocation and outcomes

Conclusion

Social media can meaningfully enhance public relations and public efforts by expanding reach, accelerating communication, supporting dialogue, and enabling real-time learning, but these benefits depend on strategic and ethical use rather than platform presence alone (Mergel, 2013; Peters et al., 2013). Effective public communication begins with defined objectives and audience understanding, followed by platform-appropriate content delivered through credible sources (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social listening and community partnerships help organizations respond to changing information needs, while advance misinformation planning protects credibility (Veil et al., 2011; Kasperson et al., 1988).

The theoretical framework developed here shows that outcomes emerge through exposure, dialogue, trust, and network diffusion, moderated by digital access and organizational capacity (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Mergel, 2013). For Nigeria's young, digital population, the opportunity is substantial, but without investment in skills and strategy, organizations will continue to underperform online (Osho, 2021).

Recent research from 2020–2026 reveals persistent gaps between policy and practice in Nigerian government social media use, the emergence of AI-driven counter-disinformation initiatives such as "Naija Falsehood Buster," and the growing influence of digital activism in shaping public discourse. Contemporary evidence demonstrates that social media significantly enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance when institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy (Abdulkareem et al., 2022), while targeted digital interventions can effectively reduce health-related misinformation (Offer-Westort et al., 2024). These developments underscore both the opportunities and challenges of social media for public communication in Nigeria. The benefits of social media are realized only when organizations move from ad-hoc posting to strategic, theory-driven social media practice that embraces dialogue, transparency, and accountability.

Recommendations

Based on the review and case analysis, organizations seeking to strengthen social media communication and public relations should:

1. Define clear, measurable objectives for each initiative, specifying the desired change in awareness, trust, participation, or behavior (Peters et al., 2013).
2. Identify audience needs, language preferences, media habits, and influential

community actors before designing content (Smith, 2012). This is particularly important in Nigeria's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, as Oludu et al. (2025) emphasize that accessibility and responsiveness are critical determinants of successful e-participatory governance.

3. Develop a documented strategy that aligns every post with communication objectives and platform-specific content (Mergel, 2013; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Abdulkareem et al. (2022) found that strategic social media use enhances citizens' willingness to participate in governance when institutions are perceived as transparent and trustworthy.
4. Establish response standards and escalation procedures, and monitor response speed and quality (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Speed is critical in digital communication environments, as Nasidi et al. (2026) found that social media responsiveness positively influences public trust in government crisis communication.
5. Partner with trusted community leaders, professionals, and credible local creators while maintaining transparency (Osho, 2021). As research shows, community leaders may be more trusted than institutional accounts during crises (Eze & Okonkwo, 2026; Ihekweazu et al., 2022).
6. Institutionalize social listening and connect its findings to planning, service improvement, and misinformation response (Veil et al., 2011). Ogbodo et al. (2026) recommend continuous monitoring as essential for reducing misinformation dissemination.
7. Prepare crisis playbooks, verified information repositories, and spokesperson lists before crises occur, and test them regularly (Kasperson et al., 1988). Ihekweazu et al. (2022) demonstrated that transparency, consistency, and audience-centred messaging significantly improve public trust during crises.
8. Adopt accessibility standards plain language, captions, alt text, and translation alongside complementary offline channel, and apply data-minimization and consent principles to monitoring and analytics (Osho, 2021).
9. Invest in staff training in content production, community management, analytics, and crisis communication (Osho, 2021). This is particularly important given the digital skills gap identified in recent research (Nwosu & Eze, 2026; Ogbodo et al., 2026).
10. Evaluate outcomes rather than activity, combining platform analytics with surveys,

interviews, and service-use data (Peters et al., 2013).

11. Support the development of AI-driven misinformation detection tools such as "Naija Falsehood Buster" while ensuring ethical oversight and transparency in their use. Offer-Westort et al. (2024) demonstrated that targeted digital interventions can significantly reduce health-related misinformation.
12. Engage with digital activists and civil society organizations such as Paradigm Initiative to build digital literacy and counter misinformation collaboratively. Uwalaka (2023) emphasizes the need for collaborative fact-checking initiatives involving multiple stakeholders.
13. Develop digital literacy programmes targeting diverse populations, as Goldstein, Grossman, and Startz (2024) found that levels of institutional trust and political affiliation affect susceptibility to misinformation.
14. Implement hybrid communication models that integrate traditional and digital platforms for crisis communication, particularly in communities with limited digital access (Eze & Okonkwo, 2026).

Future research should examine long-term and causal outcomes, rural and low-resource contexts, marginalized populations, multilingual communication, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in public social media management (Peters et al., 2013; Osho, 2021). Research is particularly needed on the effectiveness of AI-driven misinformation interventions in the Nigerian context and on strategies for bridging the digital divide in rural communities. Oludu et al. (2025) call for further research on how accessibility, responsiveness, and transparency can be operationalized in e-participatory governance frameworks.

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