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By Agha Egwu Inya

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I. Introduction

Social media have changed the pattern of corporate communications, affecting the ways public relations campaigns are formulated, disseminated and measured. The power over the message is no longer the exclusive preserve of an organisation; the various publics also enjoy equal power to initiate dialogue. Prior to the digital explosion and the popularization of the social media, audience engagement was based on print and electronic media. The focus of a PR publicity campaign was all about securing decent coverage in television, radio and dailies. With over 75% internet surfers using social media, (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), the social media have provided 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) Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, (2008) observed that public relations practitioners are shifting to social media as the lines between online and offline promotion becomes blurry.

However, the level of compliance of PR managers to the social media varies. While many public relations practitioners value the social media, a few of them actually maximise the advantage it offer to their profession. (Gordon 2010). It appears that a good number of public relations practitioners are yet to understand how social media can help improve their professional practices. Some of them simply use social media as another tool of personal communication while others do not even use them at all.

In the university system, there is high level of compliance to the social media by staff and students. Many of them depend on the social media for information on activities within and outside the university. They use the social media to share their thoughts, make inquires, and react to posts shared by other members of the university community. With their Smartphone and laptops, they monitor events in the university through the social media. The development has placed a burden on public relations practitioners in the universities. It is the burden of meeting the information needs of members of their internal and external publics using their favourite channels.

With the popularity of university ranking system, public relations practitioners cannot afford to be apathetic to the use of social media in their job. The stake has gone beyond using the social media to promote internal and external communications. It also involves positioning the university as socially relevant in the global comity of universities. Contemporary public relations practice in the university requires that the public relations practitioner should use the social media to complement research efforts of his faculties in order to improve the global rankings of his institution. One of the indicators for global ranking of universities is their web presence. The social media platforms are employed by the public relations departments of highly ranked universities to generate backlinks to their institution's websites which constitute fifty per cent of the scores by Webometric, one of the biggest university ranking agencies. Although no additional form of communication skill is required from PR managers in this direction, what is paramount is the traffic attracted to universities website through their social media platforms. This is a challenge which many PR managers of Nigerian universities seem yet to embrace.

This study therefore examines the extent to which the social media have influenced the practices of public relations practitioners in universities in South-East Nigeria

II. Statement of the Problem

Social media have provided multiple channels for public relations practitioners to engage their publics directly without relying on the traditional media. The

Author: Department of Mass Communication University of Nigeria, Nsukka. e-mail: agha.inya@unn.edu.ng

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public relations practitioners have opportunities to share real time updates on activities of their organisations and receive immediate feedback from their publics.

Some of the practitioners have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the social media to improve their professional practices and build global reputation for their organisations. On the other hand, there are some public relations practitioners who seem not to consider social media as serious channels that can be employed for the advancement of public relations programmes. At best, they use social media for their personal interactions, leaving their organisations' publics at the mercy of rumour mongers in the social space.

This study therefore intends to find out which group do public relations practitioners in South-East universities belong? Are they part of the practitioners whose practices have been influenced by the social media? This is against the backdrop that universities have high number of internal publics (youths) who use the social media, and that the social media can be used to generate backlinks considered in the global ranking of universities by the Webometric.

III. Objectives of Study

1. To determine if public relations practitioners in South-East universities use social media in their practices
2. To identify the aspect of public relations practice in the university that have been affected by the social media
3. To determine how the uses of social media have affected the personal lifestyle of the PR practitioners
4. To ascertain if public relations practitioners in South-East universities consciously use social media platforms to improve the global ranking of their universities.

Research Questions

1. Do public relations practitioners in South-East universities use social media in their professional practices?
2. What aspect of public relations practices in the university have the social media affected most?
3. To what extent have the uses of social media affected the personal lifestyles of public relations practitioners in the universities?
4. To what extent do public relations practitioners in south-east universities use social media to improve the global ranking of their institutions?

a) Significant of Study

This study will help PR practitioners in universities understand how to use the social media to create good rapport between the university administration and staff and students. Interactive channels like the social media, if well utilised, will help douse students' restiveness and reduce the problem of trade union agitations in the universities.

The study will also help public relations practitioners in Nigerian universities know how their counterparts in other highly ranked universities are using the social media to improve the global image of their institutions. It is expected that the study will propel the practitioners to strive towards building an enviable global image for their institutions.

It will also serve as eye opener to university administrators on the need to train and retrain their public relations staff on the uses of social media as well as provide them with relevant tools for on-line access.

This study will equally serve as a platform for further enquiries in related subject matters and as a resource material for researchers who intend to carry out studies in this and other related areas.

b) Scope of Study

This study covered only public relations practitioners in universities located in South-East region of Nigeria. The study was concerned with only those officially designated as public relations officers or directors of communication in their respective universities. It did not include registry or administrative staffs who are performing the functions of a public relations officer.

IV. Literature Review

a) Overview of the Social Media

Social media involve the use of mobile and web-based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse, and adjust User-Generated Content (Kietzmann, Hermkens & McCarthy, 2011). User-Generated Content (UGC) is enabled by Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 is a term encompassing a second generation of internet-based and interactive applications that are developed around user-generated and user-adjusted content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites. The term Web 2.0 is widely attributed to Tim O'Reilly who used it as the theme of a conference in 2004 referring to a second generation of Web-based services that feature openness for collaboration and interactivity (Boler, 2008, p. 39; O'Reilly, 2005). Web 2.0 allows internet users to engage in the creative process.

Social media penetration worldwide is ever-increasing. In 2016, 68.3 percent of internet users were social media users and these figures are expected to grow. North America ranks first among regions where social media is highly popular, with a social media penetration rate of 59 percent. In 2016, more than three quarters of the United States population had a social media profile. Overall, U.S. users spend more than 216 weeks minutes on social media via smartphone, 53 weekly minutes via PC, and 50 minutes per week on

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social networks via tablet devices. (https:// www.statista. com/ statistics/ 278414/number-of-worldwide-social network-users/). In Nigeria, Facebook, a leading social media platform, has over 16 million users, (https://www.statista.com) Wright & Hinson (2009, p. 15) identified the social media and social networks mostly used by PR practitioners as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube and Blog.

b) Facebook

Facebook provides social utility services that help people communicate more efficiently with their friends, families and colleagues. The technologies of Facebook facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph and digital mapping of people's real-world social connections service. It was launched in February 2004. Facebook was founded by four students of Harvard University- Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. It was initially called Facemash and was restricted to students of Harvard University. The use was later extended to people in the universities in Boston, Canada and Ivy League Universities. The Facemash software was written by Mark Zuckerberg. It was opened to members of the general public, of 13 years and above, in September 2006. There are over 1,679,433,530 Facebook users worldwide, out of which 9.3% (146, 637,000) of the subscribers are from Africa. There are over 16,000,000 Facebook users in Nigeria. (Internet World Stat, March 2017).

c) Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging social network that allows users to share real-time information in short spurts of up to 140 characters per tweet. It was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz Stone. It is online equivalent of mobile phone text messaging. Twitter users can "follow" other users or communicate by using hastags (eg #Nimbomassacre). The hastags serve as user-identifying key words that direct readers to what others think are important. Twitter is based in San Francisco but it is used in other countries. It is available in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. (Sheedy 2011).

Twitter is one of the most popular social networks worldwide. Part of the appeal is the ability of users to follow any other user with a public profile, enabling users to interact with celebrities who regularly post on the social media site. As of the fourth quarter of 2016, Twitter service averaged at 319 million monthly active users. In the last quarter of 2016, Nigeria recorded a total tweet of 1,646,212. That was the third biggest in Africa behind South Africa and Kenya. (https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selecoun)

d) LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a business and employment-oriented social networking service that operates via websites and mobile apps. Founded on December 28, 2002, and launched on May 5, 2003, it is mainly used for professional networking, including employers posting jobs and job seekers posting their CVs. As of 2015, most of the company's revenue came from selling access to information about its members to recruiters and sales professionals .As of September 2016, LinkedIn had more than 467 million accounts, out of which more than 106 million are active. LinkedIn allows members (both workers and employers) to create profiles and "connections" to each other in an online social network which may represent real-world professional relationships. Members can invite anyone (whether an existing member or not) to become a connection.

e) YouTube

YouTube was founded in February 2005. It uses web experience to share online videos. It allows people to easily upload and share video clips on www.YouTube.com. YouTube changed the way people share videos because it created a simple way to share otherwise cumbersome and large video files. Sheedy (2011) observes that before the advent of YouTube, it was difficult to share video with a large number of people. There are over one billion users of YouTube worldwide.

f) Blog

Web blog popularly known as blog is a discussion or informational website published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary-style text entries called "posts". Posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the web page. The emergence and growth of blogs in the late 1990s coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical users who did not have much experience with HTML or computer programming. Previously, knowledge of such technologies as HTML and File Transfer Protocol had been required to publish content on the Web, and as such, early Web users tended to be hackers and computer enthusiasts. Blogs allow visitors to leave online comments, and it is this interactivity that distinguishes them from other static websites.[1] In that sense, blogging can be seen as a form of social networking service. Bloggers do not only produce content to post on their blogs, but also often build social relations with their readers and other bloggers. The two popular free blog websites are www.blogger.com and www.wordpress.com/blog.

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V. Public Relations in South-East, Nigeria Universities

Wilcox (cited in Reddi 2014) defined public relations as a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of the management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its research tools.

The application of the principle of public relations to meet the goals of an organisation and maintain good relations with its public is termed corporate public relations. (Reddi 2014).

Corporate public relations are practised in almost all the universities in the South-East, Nigeria. Many universities in the region have public relations units which are either attached to the office of the Registrar or the office of the Vice-Chancellor. The first university PR unit in the region was established in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. From the inception of the university in 1960, a PR unit was placed under the registry. The primary function of the department was to publish bi-monthly or monthly information bulletins on issues of interest to the university community. The unit occasionally reacted to some issues touching on the image of the university in the press. Public relations function in the university then was ad hoc until 1975 when Mr Ignatius Dike Ogu was appointed a substantive Public Relations Officer of the university. (www.unn.edu.ng).

Explaining the reason for the creation of PR units in universities, Ogu (2016, p 38-40) said some universities set up PR units as launching pad for economic campaign. The job of the public relations officer, under this arrangement, is to organise fund raising campaigns for the development of the university using his contacts with media managers. With increasing cases of students' unrest and trade union agitations, universities appoint PR managers to manage internal relations that will promote stability within the system. PR managers are also appointed by universities to salvage their image where it is battered, or build and maintain good image where none exists; or polish and launder an already existing good image. Whatever the case, the target is to attract staff and students and funds needed to run the university.

Ogu (2016) further outlined three primary functions of a university PR manager to include: improving internal and external relations, creating and improving press relations with the university, and providing a general public relations service between the university and its various publics. Farhana (2016) concurred by outlining the following as the responsibilities of a PR manager in an educational institution:

- Expand the number of applicants to the institution.
- Help the institution to become better known.
- Help the institution to gain an enhanced reputation.
- Influence decision makers to smile upon one's institution.
- Improve internal relations; teachers, students, other administrative staff.
- Maintain good relations with the community.
- Maintain positive relations with the alumni.

The latest addition to the functions of a university PR manager is ensuring that he uses the social media to complement the research efforts of his university in order to improve its global visibility and attract favourable ranking. This has made the use of social media inevitable for public relations managers in the universities. The various social media platforms if properly utilised, direct traffic to a university's website and creates backlinks which are considered in accessing the general web presence of the university. While some university PR managers, who are concerned about their global reputations, have integrated the social media into their communication programme, others who are less concerned still see the social media as convenience media, to be used only when time permits.

VI. Empirical Review Related Literature

Studies on how public relations managers utilise the social media have attracted the attention of many researchers. Achor, Nwachukwu & Nkwocha (2015) made an evaluation of impact of social media on information management in public relations practice. The study surveyed 225 registered PR practitioners in Nigeria and discovered that almost all the practitioners utilise the social media in their professional practices. The study also found that the social media have enhanced the gate-keeping function of the PR practitioners. The study further revealed that the favourite social media channels used by Nigerian PR professionals are Facebook, twitter and blogs.

However, the study did not indicate the extent and frequency of use of social media by Nigerian PR practitioners.

This concern was addressed by the findings of Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009). They undertook a content analysis of 275 non-profit organisation profiles to assess how they used social networking sites to promote their organisational mission and programmes. Among others, they sought to answer the question of how non-profit organisations incorporate relationship development strategies into their Facebook profiles. They found that the non-profit organisations

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had not integrated most of the numerous interactive Facebook applications on their profile. They failed to capitalise on the interactivity of social networking. They also rarely distributed organisational news through the social media channels.

Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer's (2012) examined three industries – tourism, telecommunication, and pharmaceuticals using online survey to examine the comparative effect of brand communication on brand equity through social media, as against traditional media. The survey found that communication by organisations through social media affected brand perception significantly. Undoubtedly, branding has implications on customer relationship management.

Lydia and Philip (2015) did a content analytical study on the use of social media in public relations with focus on the Ghananian Financial Services Industry. The study analysed the Facebook pages of four financial institutions in Ghana and discovered that most of the posts were targeted at wining new customers. It was asymmetrical form of communication that did not make provision for interaction with old customers. The lack of feedback on majority of the posts analysed in the study was blamed on inconsistence of the posts with average intervals of two to three days. Hence the PR managers of the financial institutions in Ghana failed to explore the interactive nature of Facebook to dialogue with their customers.

In the same vein, Macnamara (2011) made assessment of how public relations practitioners are using or abusing social media. The qualitative study sampled 15 senior public relations practitioners purposefully selected from five sectors namely; large consultancies, small consultancies, corporations, government and non government organisations. The study discovered that all the practitioners said their organisations used social network in ways that exploits their interactive two-way communication capabilities and realise best practices.

Many of the studies in this area focused on the use of social media by PR managers of different organisations other than the university. With the listing of social media as one of the indicators for accessing global web presence of universities by Webometric, a study in this area has become necessary. This study therefore intends to fill that gap.

VII. Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovation Theory is considered relevant to this study. The theory was developed by Everett Rogers in 1962. It was coined from the work of a 19th-century French legal scholar and sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, titled the Laws of Limitation. Diffusion of innovations theory states that an innovation (that is, an idea, new technique, or new technology) diffuses or spreads throughout a society in a predictable pattern. A few people will adopt an innovation as soon as they hear of it. Other people will take longer to try something new, and still others will take much longer.

When a new media technology or another innovation is adopted rapidly by a great number of people, it is said to explode into being (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).The theory discussed above conforms to the study because social media are new tools corporate PR practitioners use in carrying out their duties, yet some are still skeptical about its impact in the field of public relations and are reluctant to adopt them or use them. This explains why some PR practitioners are still holding on to the traditional media for their publicity engagements, without paying attention to the new opportunities presented by the social media.

VIII. Methodology

The study area of this research work was universities located in South- East Nigeria. There are five states in South-East namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. The total number of accredited universities in the zone is 23, comprising five (5) Federal universities, six state universities and 12 private universities (NUC Bulletin, May 2017).

Qualitative research design was considered apt for this study because it enabled the researcher has access to the subjective viewpoints of the objects of the study. This is supported by Daymon and Holloway (2002) in their observation that qualitative research method helps researchers to better understand social processes, the motivations of human beings, and the contexts in which they are situated".

In-depth interview was used to generate data from respondents. It provided the researcher opportunity of generating detailed information about respondents' thoughts. This is supported by Wertz, et al (2011) when he explained that one of the advantages of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods such as surveys.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select eight (8) Public Relations Managers from eight (8) universities in the zone. The technique was considered appropriate for the study because some of the universities do not have qualified designated PR managers. It therefore became necessary to include only those from whom the researcher could get the requisite data. This is supported by the recommendation of Okeke (2001, p.143) that purposive sampling should be used if the investigator is interested in some characteristic for which only certain people know about, and if the goal of the survey is to obtain good insight and experienced critical appraisal. The subject under investigation required critical appraisal by professional PR managers, not administrative staff who are filling the gap of a public relations officer.

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The Universities whose PR managers were selected for the study included; University of Nigeria, Nsukka – Enugu State.

1. Federal University of Technology, Owerri – Imo State
2. Nnamdi Azikiwe University,Awka,-Anambra State
3. Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, - Abia State
4. Federal University, Ndufu Alike – Ebonyi State
5. Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki- Ebonyi State
6. Abia State University, Uturu, - Abia State
7. Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike –Enugu State

IX. Presentation of Findings

Do Public Relations Practitioners In South-East Universities Use Social Media For Their Professional Practices?

All the respondents agreed that they use the social media for their professional practices. However, majority of them said their uses of the social media are limited to the Facebook and Twitter. A few of them have official blogs linked to their universities websites.

Respondents A, C, D &E said their universities have personnel dedicated to social media desk. The desk officers respond to enquiries from both the internal and external publics of the universities, and also post updates on activities of the university.

Respondents A &D said their social media desks are jointly managed by personnel from the Public Relations Unit and the ICT, while Respondent C&E said the desks are manned by staff of the public relations.

Respondents B,F, G &H said their universities do not have dedicated social media officers, but their social media platforms are updated by a combined effort of PR and ICT staff. "most time, the PR staff generate the content, while the ICT will do the uploading" said respondent G.

Only respondent A&C said their units have official blog which are updated frequently.

What Aspect Of Public Relations Practices In Your University Have The Social Media Affected Most?

The respondents in general indicated that the social media have affected their practices, especially with regard to the dissemination of information to staff, students and potential students. The respondents were upbeat that the social media hold great potential in improving the practices of public relations in their institutions. More than half said that the social media have made public relations notice boards irrelevant. Respondents A &C said they use the social media (blog and Facebook) to share their press releases with the media. In the words of respondent A; "What I do is to simply share my press releases and the accompanying photographs in our official blogspot and promote them with Facebook and Twitter instead of placing photographs on notice boards, I share them on flicker or instagram. It saves me the time of sending individual mails to journalists"

Respondent D said that although the social media sometimes are used to instigate crisis in the university, they provide faster channels of responding to crisis. "Regarding notice boards, people don't have time to visit notice boards again, majority of our students source information through the social media, that is where we met them".

Respondent H said that social media helps his unit to monitor opinion of staff and students on activities and policies of the university's management. "My unit has a notice board, but very few people care to visit the board for information".

To What Extent Have The Uses Of Social Media Affected The Personal Lifestyles Of Public Relations Practitioners In The Universities?

Majority of the respondents said that the social media have taking very little of their personal time. Respondent A said the pressure of monitoring responses and providing updates on the social media platforms of his institution is not directly on him because his university has a social media desk officer who is responsible for social media communications. "However I spend some of my personal time to monitor what is happening there, but not to the level of addiction"

Respondent B said that social media have limited the quality of his personal time. "Even when I close from my office, I use my Ipad to react and monitor the flow of events in my universities social media pages, especially when the university has a major event like convocation and visits of notable personalities".

Respondent C said he hardly visit the university social media pages except if there is something that requires his attention there. "Our updates are not very frequent. I can tell you that social media have not taken away anything from my personal lifestyle"

Respondent D said his challenge with social media lies in generating spontaneous materials that would match the speed of the media."We have shortage of manpower in this area. Personally, I am always occupied with other official chores. I use the social media but not to the point of letting it interfere with my personal time"

For Respondent E and F, the social media have taken much of their personal time that they can hardly differentiate their working hours from their personal time. "With my Smartphone, there is no closing time for me" said respondent F. "Interacting on facebook serve as my way of relaxing after the day's work. Though it denies me my leisure time" said respondent E.

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Respondent G and H said that the social media have not taken anything away from their personal lifestyle because they use them occasionally.

To What Extent Do Pr Practitioners In South-East Universities Use Social Media To Improve The Global Ranking Of Their Institutions?

Majority of the respondents said that they were not aware that social media presence was considered by global ranking agencies in their rating of universities. Majority of the PR managers in universities use social media to promote activities of their vice-chancellors without making conscious efforts to generate backlink traffic to their websites.

Only respondent A said that he was aware of the usefulness of social media in enhancing global reputation of universities. "We consciously use the social media to direct traffic to our website by responding to enquiries of our staff and students, posting materials that the generate traffics, and by encouraging them to create blogs with links to the university's website"

Respondent C said he was aware of the contribution of the social media to the global ranking of universities. "I know about it but we are not doing much on that because of shortage of personnel who will be generating the contents needed to ensure steady traffic" Respondents B, D,E,F, G & H said they had no idea of the place of social media in the ranking of the universities. "I am aware they consider volume and quality of published researches, I did not know that social media had any stake" said respondent B. "Universities are ranked based on the quality of research publications of their staff, what has social media got to do with the ranking?, queried Respondent D "It is possible that social media have a stake in the ranking, we are not conscious of that" said respondent E

X. Discussion of Findings

The study discovered that the social media have redefined the practices of public relations in the universities. Notice boards that were one of the traditional channels of disseminating information to the internal publics of the university have been replaced with facebook and instagram which are the preferred channels for students. The university PR managers no longer wait for the traditional media to publish their press releases, they provide updates on activities using blogs, facebook and twitter platforms. While the social media can be used to instigate crisis in the universities, they also provide faster channels for university PR mangers to combat rumours and respond to potential harmful comments against their institutions.

The study further discovered that all the public relations managers in the universities in the zone use the social media for their professional practices. This is in agreement with the findings of Achor et al (2015). Although the extent of their uses varies depending on skill and the disposition of individual practitioners, it is commendable that PR managers are flowing with trends in information dissemination. University students, who constitute the bulk of internal public of the university, are social media users. It is necessary that PR practitioners should engage them in their favourite channels.

The findings of the research also revealed that social media use by PR managers in the universities have not significantly affected their personal lifestyle. This implies that many of the managers fall under the social media personality category described by Odii (2013, p. 162) as "Dippers". According to Odii, "Dippers" access their social media pages infrequently, often in days or weeks without posting updates and they are not addicted to the social media. This attitude towards the social media has created information gaps which are exploited by rumour mongers to spread malicious information against many universities.

The discovery that many PR managers, in the zone under study, are not aware of the impact of the social media on the global ranking of the universities rattles the mind. The implication is that many of the managers use the social media as convenient channels of communication not as integral part of their global visibility strategy. The Webometric Ranking of World Universities is the largest web-based academic performance ranking system. It accesses over 24,000 universities worldwide. The ranking system is built using a combined indicator called WR. In the rankings, the number of published web pages constitute twenty-five percent; the number of rich files, those in pdf, ps, doc and ppt format form 12.5 percent; the number of articles gathered from the Google Scholar Database constitute another 12.5 percent and the total number of external networks (subnets like facebook, twitter, blogs, etc) originating backlinks to the institutions web pages form fifty percent of the ranking grading. (Aguillo, Ortega, & Fernández 2008). The effect of social media in the ranking cannot be overemphasised. Using the social media to generate the fifty percent backlinks should be a major concern of PR managers who desire to improve the global visibility of their universities.

XI. Conclusions

The purpose of this work was to examine the influence of the social media on public relations practices in universities in South-East. Qualitative research method was used. Eight public relations managers from universities across the five states of the South-East were interviewed through personal contacts and telephone interview. The study discovered that the increasing use of the social media by the managers has changed the traditional methods of information dissemination in the universities. The social media have

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not affected the personal lifestyle of the managers because majority of them use the social media occasionally. Majority of the PR managers use the social media occasionally because they are not aware that the social media can be used to generate backlinks to their websites which are highly considered in the global ranking of their universities.

XII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are considered important

1. Public relations units and directorates of information in the universities should employ personnel dedicated to the social media. Updating information on the social media platforms of the universities should not depend on the breaking of major news events. Contents should be generated and shared on daily basis.
2. PR managers in the university should prioritize using social media to enhance the global ranking of their universities. Therefore, it is suggested that the managers should mandate every staff of their public relations unit and ICT to create blog, facebook and twitter accounts with hyperlinks to their institution's website. This will help in generating the backlinks needed to improve the Webometric ranking of their universities.
3. Further research should be carried out on the influence of university location on the social media usage by public relations practitioners.

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