Influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on Modern Public Relations and Advertising Practice in Nigeria

PEPPLE, Iwowari Ibituru, *PhD*
Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Nigeria
&
ACHOLONU, Ijeoma, *PhD*
Department of Journalism
International Institute of Journalism, Abuja
&
KOKO, Reginald
Department of English and Mass Communication
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt

Abstract
The use of ICTs has increased among consumers around the world, causing an increase in the adoption of social media as a means of sharing information among many public relations and advertising professionals. This new form of communication is growing at such a rapid pace because the communications world is dramatically moving in a digital direction and those who understand this transformation will communicate much more effectively than those who do not. Thus, this study examined the application of ICTs in advertising and public relations practice in Nigeria and the extent to which the practitioners in Rivers State apply ICTs in planning and executing such campaigns. One hundred and eighty-one (181) practitioners of both NIPR and APCON were studied out of a total population of 369 using the Krejice & Morgan (1970) sampling table. The work was guided by the Marshall McLuhan's theory of Technological Determinism. The qualitative and quantitative research designs were both used in this study as data gathered were analysed accordingly. The study found out among others that NIPR and APCON members in Rivers State are well exposed to the use of ICTs in doing business. It concluded that advertising practitioners as well as public relations practitioners should be much more proactive to fit in within the new media sphere as the world is evolving ICT-wise very rapidly and recommended among others that NIPR and APCON should emphasise continuous ICT engagements and retraining for its practitioners.

Keywords: Public Relations, Practitioners, Advertising, ICTs, Technological Determinism, Nigeria

Introduction

In the early days of traditional public relations and advertising (PRAD), PRAD related activities were executed via press releases, radio and television jingles, press conferences and briefing but since the dawn of the 21st century, public relations and advertising practice has adapted to modern media and incorporated many new channels, including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This is because the advancement in modern technology resulted in building the computer/internet technology which has transformed the world into a global village as predicted by the Canadian English professor, Marshal McLuhan. This new technology has compressed the whole world into a single electronic sphere where information could be shared with just a click (McLuhan as cited in Griffin, 1998, p. 337).

In the views of many communication scholars like Gasher and Lorimeter (as cited in Ehidiamen, 2010), the world now depends on technology for her communications with others. In the second half of the 20th Century, it became almost impossible to live without a telephone and now we hardly live without personal computers through which we gain Internet access and send and receive mails. The reality of the new communications technology is that anyone is able to get in touch with anyone else, anywhere, at any time.

The arrival of this information and communication technology has affected the usual shapes of every human activities ranging from education to agriculture, business, mass communication, politics, health. However, the practice of public relations and advertising are not exceptional as ICT has influenced both as currently practiced in this century.

Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that the practice of PRAD in this century has moved from manual to digital public relations and advertising. This technological movement has helped to reduce the time, speed and rigour needed to accomplish a given public relations and/or advertising tasks, financial commitment and inefficiency. These advantages also score it high as a desirable management tool for responding to both internal and external organisational tasks (Agbomehreabd, 2009).

Today, organisations and clients are making greater demand for public relations and advertising professionals that are more ICT creative, more innovative and more efficient in service delivery. As the world continues to globalise, the trend has changed, and is still changing, requiring comprehensive and effective ways of measuring the value of public relations and advertising. This is predicated on the demand for business results that are into the analytical space (Taylor as cited in Vaungwa, 2014).

The Internet has caused a revolution in communication by giving a voice to those that previously could not have been heard. This has opened a whole new world of opportunities for both businesses and individuals that were unimagined in the era of the traditional media. These still play important roles in shaping the public opinion, granting access to more but with the entire globe moving to the online world to search

for information and buy products/services, a PR and advert practitioner that does not effectively communicate with the online community can no longer effectively shape and maintain the desired public image.

Therefore, due to the rise in ICT use among consumers around the world, there is need for an increase in the use of ICT as tactics for Public Relations and Advertising practitioners. Because this new form of communication is growing at such a rapid pace, it is important to analyse the impact ICTs have on the overall public relations and advertising practice as well as how essential for PRAD practitioners to fully embrace the innovation in reaching out to most of their publics.

It is based on this general objective that this paper examines how PRAD practitioners in Rivers state of Nigeria are using ICT in modern public relations and advertising practice.

Statement of the Problem

ICTs drive the new communication technologies that combine the computer and telecommunication technologies and are used as channels for the dissemination of information to a heterogeneous audience regardless of time, space and distance. We therefore have a situation whereby most media related firms and the adjuncts of mass communication like public relations and advertising now depend on these ICT tools to reach their various publics. In essence, ICTs define modern PRAD advertising.

However, despite the advantages of time, space, speed, distance, and overall practice efficiency offered by ICT tools, there are still some practitioners that are not able to afford the cost of adequate access to the needed ICT tools to engage in modern PRAD practice. There is also the issue of lack or inadequate power supply to support ICT deployment in some PRAD establishments. These, sadly, are some of the 21st century realities of so-called modern PRAD organisations in the Nigerian context.

Based on this argument, this study seeks to examine how ICT tools are deployed in contemporary PRAD practice in Nigeria, using NIPR and APCON registered members in Rivers state as case study to establish adequate and efficient application or the lack of it.

Objectives of the Study

This paper generally aims to find out the influence of ICT deployment on modern public relations and advertising practice in Nigeria. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. determine the level of exposure of PRAD practitioners in Rivers State to ICT tools;
2. identify the ICT tools frequently used by PRAD practitioners in Rivers state; and
3. assess the challenges associated with the deployment of ICT tools among PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated.

1. What is the level of exposure of PRAD practitioners in Rivers State to ICT tools?
2. What are the ICT tools frequently used by PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges associated with the deployment of ICT tools among PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria?

Conceptual Clarification and Literature Review

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria

Information and communication technology is used as a general term for diverse set of technologies which enable users to create, access, disseminate, store, manage and communicate information in a digital format. These include computer hardware and software applications, mobile phones, computers, network hardware, internet, telecommunications systems etc.

Information and communication technology has given communication and information dissemination a new outlook including the creation of a new channel or medium of communication. According to Agbanu (2011), in different parts of the globe, the advancement in information and communication technologies has made the sharing of news and information a lot easier, clearer and faster. He stated further that as a result, it is no longer news that an occurrence in any part of the world can be simultaneously shared among different nations regardless of the remoteness, cultural or geographical pluralism in the place of occurrence.

Corroborating this fact, Nwodu cited in Agbanu (2011) notes that the revolution taking place in communication technologies has further reduced the world of human from McLuhan's global village to "a tiny global family" which is the lowest level of social grouping. This is synonymous to what Ekeanyanwu (2015) calls the "villagisation of the globe". Pepple (2012) also states that the global village phenomenon has given rise to a global family phenomenon as the internet has made it smaller than what McLuhan ever imagined.

In his view, Womboh (2008) sees ICT as term with three different concepts, comprising of information, communication and technology. He states further that for one to understand ICT, the three concepts must be understood. According to Ajah (2011), information is a processed data. It can also be described as that which aids decision making. Information though abstract can also be visualised as a commodity, which could be bought or sold. De Waterville & Gilbert (as cited in Ajah, 2011) defined information as any potentially useful fact, quantity or value that can be expressed uniquely with exactness. They further stated that information is whatever is capable of causing a human mind to change into opinion about the current state of the real world.

Communication, on the other hand, is a tool for human identification, image-building, maintenance of socio-cultural relationships and a gateway for global co-existence and interaction. Communication is a necessary tool through which information is passed to every stratum of society. Communication refers to the exchange of information from person to person or from one place to another. When action produces a reaction, whether positive or negative, communication has taken place (Womboh, 2008). Agee (as cited in Ndolo, 2005) states that communication is an act of transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another. He further states that communication has not only remained a critical component of society but constitutes the very fulcrum on which society resolves.

Technology, on its part, refers to the use of scientific knowledge to invent tools that assist human beings in their efforts to overcome environmental hazards and impediments to comfort. It also could refer to things such as computer, telephone, cell phone, GSM handsets, television, social media networks, blogsites, etc. (Ajah, 2011). Communication is information delivered to its appropriate channel with all concerned benefitting the end result of the messenger. Thus, information and communication technology has made end-to-end message much easier, better and largely appreciated by all the parties to an information with wider channels created for greater participation in the process of encoding and decoding of messages.

ICTs, Modern Public Relations and Advertising

The rapid development of information technologies, the computer and internet technology, online shopping, and social networking have contributed to changes, not only in consumers but also in marketing research communication and methods, particularly public relations and advertising (Beauchamp, Bowie & Arnold cited in Tine, 2014). For instance, there is an increase in connection between people through the social media which makes social media or networks more viable for business purposes. Consumers now prefer online business transactions because of the various advantages associated with such.

For the avoidance of doubt, ICTs as used in the context of this paper, cover wide range of electronic equipment or devices adopted for communication within and outside the workplace. These range of devices include cellular phones, facsimile machine, computer, electronic-mails, beepers, the internet, the world wide web, social networks and so on (Weihricvh & Koontz, 1991). Other facilities are wikis, websites, podcasting, instant messaging, text messaging, web casting, blog, video conferencing, online discussion forum and others (Griffith, 2007).

The awareness on ICT in Nigeria has grown by the year and a large percentage of Nigerians now use the social media. In other words, the internet penetration in Nigeria has continued to increase. This has opened a new phase in what a society is

and should be, including virtual living. According to Mohammed (2013), the use of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have become as ordinary and necessary as shopping and going to work. People spend long hours of the day and night glued to the Internet in their homes, offices or classrooms. For instance, when a PRAD professional posts a message on one of these platforms, it means that billions of people would have access to the message.

Tine (2014) further observes that consumers are now increasingly doing their shopping online, downloading digital versions of tangible products, and closing off business deals online. This being the case, online shopping is becoming a matter of experience, ambience and service. Tine (2014) further notes that after home and work, retail outlets are becoming the third most important place where consumers live. Modern technology is becoming a basic need (like food and clothing), thus becoming more important than a luxury or pleasure.

Consequently, modern technology, particularly the Internet is gaining importance as a consumer environment, thereby opening new frontiers for public relations and advertising practitioners. Thanks to the internet, the world of PR is continuously evolving. When the PR industry was first pioneered, it was created as a way to communicate proactively with media rather than always being in crisis mode when the media got hold of a story. Over time it has become a powerful marketing tool, creating awareness and connecting audiences with brands through credible third-party endorsements. Today, PR is truly about relating to your audiences and engaging them indirectly and directly (Fortney, 2014).

The primary role of public relations is to manage reputation both for a company and individual within and outside the corporate world, and help build public consent for its enterprises. The term public relations has been defined by different experts. According to Arens (1999, p. 310), public relations is a management function that focuses on the relationships and communications that individuals and organisations have with other groups called (publics) for the purpose of creating mutual goodwill. Offonry as cited in Nkana (2005) defines public relations as the business of creating and maintaining public understanding and support through effective communications, noting that it is also a continuing and constructive interchange between those who are affected by or interested in that business.

The purpose of public relations is "to create goodwill, understanding and awareness…of an organisation or institution by using the PR techniques of persuasion, information and education to project the organisation to its public (Daramola as cited in Ehidiamen, 2010). The role of public relations is basically to achieve harmony, mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics through effective two-way communication. It is a proactive long term effort aimed at sustaining a mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and its public.

In recent times, PR has evolved from one-way to two-way communications where it sends messages and actively seeks feedback. It provides avenues for the public to initiate the communication process through complaints and inquiries. According to Hayes' study

(as cited in Ohaja, 2011), practitioners began to realise that successful public relations needs to be as much about listening and being influenced, as influencing and guiding, in order to support organisations in this if increasingly and technologically connected and fragmented world. Public relations is therefore a management function that identifies the needs of an organisation and those of its external and internal publics and synergises these and implements a programme of actions and communications so as to have a lasting symbolic relationship between them.

The World Wide Web has opened a number of opportunities and has given just about everyone the ability to share their opinion just about everything with the entire world in a matter of seconds. The ability to reach thousands or millions of people in virtually no time has given PR specialists a powerful tool. The good news is that the amount of time people spend interacting with the media is only growing: but the bad news is that traditional PR is rooted in tactics that were relevant twenty years ago. (Burke, 2013)

When you talk about traditional PR, what people usually have in mind would be the press release of course. The press releases act just like a presentation of who, what, when, how, why and they define the current events of an organisation. It is a one time or every so often speech of your capabilities and what you can do. It is very formal, well designed and professional. However, it only engages the audience if they choose to do so. Writing a press release means creating speech not a conversation and this is where the essential problem lies when it comes to the debate of traditional methods of public relations vs modern PR strategies.

Thus, modern PR has created the dynamic and on-going shifts occurring in media and audience interaction. Social media have also created an environment where every day needs to be a presentation of your 'big idea'. Conversation is audience engagement. It is usually what comes after a speech is done if they decide to accept your branding points. Rather than speaking to your public, social media give you the chance to directly 'converse' with them and speak at their level.

Secondly, the best way to converse with the audience rather than speak with them is to blog. The blog does what the press release does not; it speaks to a large audience at a human level. It updates them accordingly and allows them to seek the chance to interact. Information is brought directly to them and it keeps them posted on the day to day organisational occurrences. When you blog, you are not being formal. But you are being realistic. A blog could represent who the company actually is. When you create audience engagement, you preserve and nurture your audience, generate audience interaction, and eventually produce audience support and passion for your organisation.

Certainly, the press release still plays a crucial role as it acts as a general source for branding specific points of an organisation in the long run. But the blog gives the audience a much more up-to-date and realistic version of what they truly are day in and day out. According to Panepento, cited in Miller (2015), gone are the days when we could communicate at our potential audiences. We can no longer rely solely on news releases, stories about donations and annual galas or announcements about our work. Today non-

profit communications teams should instead be thinking about how they can be speaking to the people they most want to reach - whether those people are reporters, potential donors, or activists. To buttress this fact, Edelman (2013) notes that leaders must have three kinds of intelligence to thrive in the world of today and tomorrow: a high IQ (Intelligent Quotient), a solid EQ (Emotional Intelligence) and outstanding SQ (Social Intelligence).

PR professionals must understand that what really drives opinion in society include reputation, brand and stakeholders' involvement. Based on this, it is therefore expected that these should help shape behaviour of the audience towards the brand. In other words, the PR department should no longer be the only mouthpiece of the organisation; the audience or consumers of the brand also have a unique role to play through their blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and YouTube channels. They could comfortably reach the various publics of the brand with your message. In as much as it is good to tell your story in the mainstream media, it is good to consider the trend, and many professionals have shifted from the media and empowered their supporters to be their story tellers.

Moguluwa (2007, p. 32) states that**,**

> The modern public relations managers are caught in the web of information generation, gathering and dissemination and constant communication with all the publics of the organisation. The tasks involved are both enormous and challenging, but with the recent development and improvement in technology especially in the area of information and communication, the tasks seem surmountable. Basically, the public relations managers are involved among other functions and activities with writing and speaking.

The third aspect of this review is on the concept of advertising. The term advertising originated from the Latin word "ad vertere" meaning "to turn the mind towards" a product, service, idea, movement, opinion, cause, or fashion as well getting people to consume less of other products (Okoro, 2013). Advertising business in Nigeria could be traced to 1928 when United Africa Company (UAC) established the West African Publicity Limited, to provide marketing support services for the company and its colonial masters in both Nigeria and West Africa. In 1929, this department was later transformed into a full-fledged advertising agency which was known as Lever International Advertising Services (Lintas) and still exists till date in Nigeria having both local and global presence. This development has not only changed the advertising sector in Nigeria but it has opened a global window for the Nigerian advertising industry and the economy as whole.

Advertising as a concept could be defined as a form of communication through the media about product, services, ideas, personalities or organisations, paid for by an identified sponsor (Aliede cited in Okunna, 2002). It is structured to fill a predetermined space and time which may be controlled by the sponsor as buttressed by Arens (1997) when he noted that advertising is the structured and composed non-personal

communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, goods, services and ideas by identified sponsors through various media.

Bovee & Arens (1992) gave a more widely accepted definition of advertising as the non-personal communication of information, usually paid for by an identified sponsor, and usually persuasive in nature about products (goods and services) or ideas through various media. It is often a persuasive communication in that it tries to persuade the reader, the listener or the viewer to take to the sponsors own point of view and also to take some appropriate action like making a patronage of the advertised product or service. It is not personal or face to face communication, rather it is directed to a group of people.

According to the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria (APCON) "advertising is a form of communication through the media about products, services or ideas, paid for by an identified sponsor" (APCON Code of Advertising Practice, 1993 as cited in Ewa, 2015).

All advertising experts above agreed that advertising is a non-personal communication of information, paid for by a known sponsor, persuasive, channelled through a medium and about product, brand and/or services.

Modern advertising is growing rapidly because of the use of social media and therefore phasing off the old traditional advertising system. There are different ways of advertising products through traditional advertising but they are not good enough for businesses. For instance, billboards are great for businesses but if a company is planning for a global market to compete in, then, billboards will not be the best option. Businesses with a large and dynamic market will need effective advertising to stay competitive and this can be achieved through social media advertising such as on-line marketing. This is because, todays on-line advertising allows marketers to achieve the same results as with traditional advertising, but in a much more effective manner.

Modern advertising also reaches more people in less time, which can help a company realize its true potential. With a limited budget, on-line advertising will be the easier option to take. If the traditional methods are used such as billboards, the company may still need to add more information for social media. Through on-line marketing methods such as social media, the company will be able to sign up for free. For instance, a billboard for the Rivers State Signage and Advertising Agency located at a strategic place still had on it contacts for social media such as Facebook address, Twitter handle and email address.

Therefore, effective advertising must keep up with trends and technology updates. Because of its trendy nature, it is extremely important for advertising agencies and even companies to be aware of the trends and future trends of advertising. Without a doubt, the social media are making it easier for businesses to communicate with their publics. With the introduction of social media, businesses have found and developed novel ways of communicating with their publics, such as online marketing which can help all who are online to access information and resources they need to know about your business.

Tools for Message Transmission in PRAD Practice

Most of the information generated by PRAD practitioners gets to the organisation publics through the media. The information must be transmitted to the target audience by the practitioner bearing in mind the most appropriate medium to use. According to Agbanu (2011, p. 388), the media are the vehicle or conveyor belt through which public relations and advertising messages are delivered to the target audience. He further states that a careful analysis of all the media will reveal the most appropriate one to be used in reaching the target audience or market, an understanding of the demographic and psychographic variables of the proposed audience especially their habits, age, economic and occupational status including the sex and marital status would indicate their media preference.

By observation, the social media networks are suitable for all forms of audiences because of its viral nature. People have always said good and bad things about brands, and now that social media have risen in popularity, it means people have another platform to talk about your company products/services as PRAD practitioner. The major difference, however, is in the viral nature of these social media platforms or networks. For example, when someone mentions your brand on social media, there is much more potential for other people to notice, and its monumentally easier for conversations to spread much more quickly and easily. In addition, these conversations have the potential to reach a much larger audience than ever before. Any company that is not participating in social media in this present time is missing an opportunity to spread its message and missing valuable – and even damaging – conversations that could be taking on such related networks.

One of the best ways to land a mention of a business in the media is to start by connecting with the journalists, reporters, bloggers, and influencers who cover topics in the industry. Luckily, the web and social media are great facilitators of this. Whereas a practitioner previously had to go through mass media to get a message across, the web and social media now give access to a whole slew of influencers with which one can easily interact and develop relationships. Thus, there are technologies for sending a variety of written messages that are widely used in the word today such as Twitter. Using Twitter is a great way to introduce practitioners and their companies to the social media. It is a well-known fact that many freelance journalists, reporters, and bloggers make themselves available on Twitter.

Another widely used communication technology is Facebook. The system helps practitioners to post activities of their organisation and receive immediate feedback. They should stay on top and participate in discussions occurring on their company's Facebook Fan Page. PR and Advert Managers making themselves available to the people on this space is a great way to communicate with them about a number of things; which may include a product update, a maintenance issue, or the intention of receiving feedback about the company's products or services.

Technology also gives the PRAD practitioners the opportunity to set up multiple

Google Alerts for the company, brand, products, leaders, etc. The alerts will get delivered directly to the email inbox at the frequency they indicate (e.g. daily or as they happen). This is a great way to help practitioners track media coverage and mentions of their brand on the web on news sites, blogs, etc.

WhatsApp is also effectively used to transmit written information. It has the advantage of immediacy as well as less formal than sending a printed document. Practitioners can also chat with their publics through WhatsApp because it is a network that has become very popular among Nigerians. Messages can be sent with speed alongside smileys, pictures of all sorts can also be sent through the platform while the people can also contact the manager through the WhatsApp number.

Videoconferencing is another system that improves productivity. It combines oral and video communication effectively and saves travel, time and expenses as well as eliminate many scheduling problems and travel hazards.

PRAD practitioners could also conduct and coordinate their businesses from anywhere or any part of the world through the GSM. GSM makes it possible for the managers to be reached from anywhere. For instance, before the advent of GSM in Nigeria, it was difficult to reach the public but with the arrival of four national networks, MTN, Globacom, Etisalat and Airtel during the Obasanjo administration, practitioners now enjoy the benefits and convenience associated with the technology.

Blogs have also become an integral part of advertising and public relations strategies. Many organisations are embracing corporate blogging and are already interacting with their publics through their corporate websites. Corporate blogs are being looked at as a platform for businesses to thrive and maintain an on-going conversation with customers. Scot, as cited in Ajah (2011), states that the easiest way of finding out what the market place is thinking about a corporate company and its products is through a blog. He further states that most PR and marketing people are aware of blogs and should constantly monitor what's being said about their company, product and executives on this new medium.

Theoretical Framework

The Marshall McLuhan's theory of Technological Determinism, “the medium is the message” formed the basis on which this work is anchored. The main tenet of the theory according to Nwodu, as cited in Nwammuo (2011), is to draw the attention of the media audience to the underlying effects of New Communication Technologies. McLuhan, according to Griffin (2003), was convinced that the way we live is largely a function of the way we process information. Wolfe's study, as cited in Griffin (2000), summarises McLuhan's thesis thus: “The new technologies radically alter the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things and therefore, their entire lives and the entire society. It doesn't matter what the content of a medium like TV is; the medium is the message”

In essence, there is no doubt that the primary channel of communication changes the way society perceive the world. The dominant medium of any age dominates the people (Griffin, 1994). This theory is therefore apt for this paper because the ICT tools are new innovations that have been embraced by the modern society because they have drawn practitioners closer to their publics. The ICT tools if properly used by PRAD practitioners would reach out to the world from one point to another, thus, making businesses, commercial activities and relationships to thrive.

Part of the argument of this theory that makes it relevant in this paper is captured in Ekeanyanwu & Odukomaiya (2008, p. 110) thus:

> …. the nature of media technology prevailing in a society at a given point in time greatly influences how the members of that society think and behave. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) state that McLuhan elaborated on Innis's thesis and characterised television as a "cool" medium because of its capacity for rich configurations of audio-visual stimuli, which elicits high but passive audience participation. From the technological determinist's perspective, the most important characteristic of the audience-media interface is the technological properties of the medium. Thus, McLuhan asserts, "The medium is the message" (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982, p. 184). According to McLuhan (1964), all social, economic, political and cultural changes are based on the development and diffusion of technology. His argument in this theory is based on the need draw the attention of media audience to the hidden effects of communications technologies, especially with regard to culture, leading to his now famous phrase "global village".

Methodology

In appraising ICT as effective tool for modern public relations and advertising in Nigeria, the study adopted both qualitative and quantitative designs for data collection. This means we used both the in-depth interview schedule and questionnaire respectively to gather relevant data needed in the study. We considered both designs relevant because of the depth and nuances expected in the data from such platforms. We are also of the view that PRAD practitioners' opinions were the main source of primary data collection, hence, the conclusion to use both the in-depth interview and survey for data gathering. The two designs help to gauge or probe directly or indirectly, attitudes, feelings and dispositions of samples towards a given phenomenon and by extension using the outcome to generalise on the entire population.

The population for this study were all registered PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria which is 369. From this population figure gotten from the professional associations state offices in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 197 are registered NIPR members and 172 are registered APCON members.

The sampling procedure adopted in this study was partly purposive and partly availability sampling techniques whereby the researchers identified the meetings days of

the two professional associations and went there to administer the questionnaire to only the registered members of the selected two associations who were available during the visit. The administration of the questionnaire was continuous until the required number was achieved. The interviewees were, however, careful selected as prominent members of both associations were considered primarily because of their background and knowledge-base in the industry. NIPR and APCON were selected because they are involved in the creation and execution of PRAD messages using different forms of ICT tools.

The sample size for this study was 181 advertising and public relations practitioners selected from NIPR and APCON in Rivers State. In determining the sample size, the Krejice & Morgan (1970) sampling table was used. According to Krejice & Morgan (1970), if the population of a study is in the range of 360 and 400, a sample size of 181 is assumed appropriate. This is further validated by other measurement experts in the Humanities and the social sciences.

Data, Results and Discussion of Findings

ICT tools have changed and reshaped people's perception and individual ways of doing things. Businesses are conducted from anywhere with easy and wide acceptability. This agrees with the postulation of Marshal McLuhan, who argued that this new technology will revolutionise and compress the entire whole world into a single electronic sphere, where information about far and near can be exchanged and shared with just a click of the mouse. Thus, the 181 respondents in this study all agreed to the efficacy of the ICT tools and the ease in carrying out their PRAD businesses and transactions.

Technology also gives the PRAD practitioners the opportunity to set up multiple Google Alerts for the company, brand, products, leaders, etc. The alerts will get delivered directly to the email inbox at the frequency they indicate (e.g. daily or as they happen). This is a great way to help practitioners track media coverage and mentions of their brand on the web on news sites, in blogs, etc. Facebook is another widely used communication technology. The system helps practitioners to post activities of their organisation and receive immediate feedback.

As earlier stated, the survey research method was used in this study, whereby the questionnaire was administered to the selected members of NIPR and APCON in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria to obtain answers from them on the exposure of

NIPR/APCON members to ICT tools as well as the benefits and challenges. Table 1 below shows the level of exposure.

Table 1: Level of Exposure to ICT Tools

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Well exposed	171	94
Less exposed	10	6
Total	**181**	**100**

Source: field survey 2019

Table 1 above shows that 94% of PRAD practitioners in Rivers state claim to be well exposed to ICT tools in their day-to-day professional activities.

Another primary objective of this study was ascertain the adoption of ICT tools in PRAD practice by practitioners in Rivers State, Nigeria. Table 2 below shows that 96% of the practitioners claim to apply ICT tools in the discharge of their professional duties.

Table 2: Adoption of ICT Tools for Professional Practice by PRAD Practitioners

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	174	96
No	7	4
Total	**181**	**100**

Source: field survey 2019

Table 3 below shows the practitioners" response on the benefits they think accrue to the deployment or adoption of ICT tools in PRAD practice. As is expected, all the practitioners think that ICT tools are very beneficial to PRAD practice

Table 3: Benefits from ICT Tools to PRAD Practice

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Very Beneficial	181	100
Not Beneficial	-	-
Undecided	-	-
Total	**181**	**100**

Source: field survey 2019

The primary objective of the data presented on Table 4 below was to establish the ICT Tools commonly used by PRAD practitioners in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. From the data presented, all the practitioners use Internet and by implication, computer-based technologies but in actual use for the dissemination of PRAD messages to their publics, 43% claim to use WhatsApp while 33% use Facebook.

Table 4: ICT Tools Frequently Used for the Dissemination of PRAD Messages

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	78	43
Twitter	43	24
Facebook	60	33
Total	**181**	**100**

Source: field survey 2019

On the issue of challenges faced by the practitioners in their attempt to deploy ICT tools in modern PRAD practice, the practitioners were quick to mention lack of or inadequate power supply, power remuneration and inadequate financial resources to purchase the latest technologies in town as well as the other challenges associated with online exposure like viral attack, hacking and other security breaches.

Data from Personal Interviews

The earlier stated Research Questions were used as interview guide in the personal interviews conducted with some selected prominent members of NIPR and APCON. In essence, the practitioners were asked to respond to these questions:

1. What is the level of exposure of PRAD practitioners in Rivers State to ICT tools?
2. What are the ICT tools frequently used by PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges associated with the deployment of ICT tools among PRAD practitioners in Rivers state, Nigeria?

The responses of the practitioners did not differ from the outcome of the survey on majority of members. For the benefit of doubt, Mr. Standfast Jack, a prominent member of NIPR in Rivers State said information to members are mostly sent through the use of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter platforms. According to him, with the increasing awareness on the use of the new media of communication, people do a lot of business transactions on the aforementioned platforms. Thus, it is easier to transact business using the new media which are daily shaping the lifestyle of most individuals and corporate organisations. He added that the few challenges hinge on epileptic services provided by the network providers and poor finances to subscribe to multiple networks.

On his part, the immediate past chairman of NIPR Rivers State and also a member of APCON, Mr. Karibi George, stated that the new media have changed the way people and government do business. According to him, things are a lot easier, as people are increasingly aware of the benefit of ICT tools in their everyday lives. He further stated, "People are easily reached through ICT that is new media channels than any other

traditional means of communications, therefore, adoption of ICT is not a bargain but a choice". Karibi George also echoed that the most common used new media platforms are Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. He also opined that businesses are transacted easily on these platforms as well as other social media networks without hitches, making them compulsory tools for modern PRAD practice.

Mrs. Harriet Jamaica, on her own part said the new media have made interactions and relationships easier and more rewarding. In her own words, "there is little or no challenge with the use of the ICT channel for communication, and I prefer Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook for professional practice and I have also observed that most of my colleagues use these more frequently. She also observed that Telegram is also coming in vogue but not readily used like the others earlier mentioned."

Dr Mike Ukaegbu**,** who is another prominent member of NIPR and APCON also agreed that the NIPR and APCON members in Rivers state are well exposed to the use of ICT tools in their professional transactions. In his words, "Transactions are now easier and simpler, e-commerce and e-public relations are the in thing now".

Other interviewees corroborated what all the others have said that have been reported above. It is therefore right to conclude that NIPR and APCON members in Rivers State are well exposed to the use of ICT in their PRAD practice and most of them encounter minimal challenges trying to apply ICT tools in their professional practice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The arrival and use of ICT tools have affected the usual shapes of every human activities ranging from education to agriculture, business, mass communication, politics, health-care delivery etc. There is now a shift, as modern PR and Advert have created a more robust media interactive audiences, where people meet virtually and exchange ideas, information and transact businesses without face to face contacts. Thus, advertising practitioners as well as public relations practitioners should be much more proactive to fit in within the new media sphere as the world is evolving ICT-wise and very rapidly too.

More access should be created to ease communication and broaden commerce, political interaction and relationships, as the benefits of ICT are enormous. The dependence on ICT tools today, is unexplainable. Trainings and e-workshops should be made possible for practitioners since 'we depend on technology for communications with one another".

It is also expected that NIPR and APCON as professional associations within the PRAD industry should emphasise continuous ICT engagements for its practitioners, trainings, and retraining to keep abreast of the latest in technology release and acquisition.

More awareness for interactions and communications should be encouraged to boost commerce, politics and trainings. Online platforms should also be encouraged with

dedicated administrators to boost ICT use in the practice of PRAD.

Finally, it is our honest opinion based on the outcome of this study that more modern PRAD engagement should be encouraged but the traditional PRAD engagement should also be allowed to co-exist side by side with the modern ICT platforms, as some Nigerians are still grasping with growing trends in ICT acquisition and deployment.

References

Agbanu, V. (2011). Advertising and Public Relations Research: An Introduction. In V. Agbanu & C. Nwabueze (Eds), *Reading in Mass Communication: Global Perspectives on Communication Issues.* Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Agbomehre, M. M. and Henry, O. M. (2009). *Government Bureaucracy and Peace Building in Nigeria*. Accessed on 20/12/2019 from www/all_academics.com.

Arens, W. F. (1999). *Contemporary Advertising*. New York: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

Bovee, C. L. & Arens, W. F. (1992). *Contemporary Advertising* (4th ed). Boston: Irwin, Inc.

Burke, K. (2013). How to Modernize a Public Relations Strategy that's struck in the Dark Ages. Retrieved from http//www.blog.hotspot.com 12/05/2018

Edelman, M. (2013). *How to Navigate the Four Trends Modern Public Relations.* Retrieved from http//www.edelman.com on 12/05/2018.

Ehidiamen, J. (2010) Information technology as a public relations tool for national development. Retrieved from www.basicresearchwithjenlee.blogspot.com. 10/04/2016.

Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2015). *International Communication (Third Edition).* Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publishers.

Ekeanyanwu, N. T. & Odukomaiya, S. (2008). Indigenous Culture, Communication and Globalization in Developing Societies: A Case for Cultural Development Hypothesis. *International Journal of Communication,* 8 (1), 102-123.

Ewa, B. I. (2015) Creativity, Advertising and National Development: an Assessment of An Interface. *Journal of Contemporary Communication*, 1 (3). 80-100.

Fortney, J. (2014) *Modern PR vs Traditional PR: What you need to know.* Retrieved from http//www.nbcchicago.com on 10/04/2018.

Griffin, E. (2000). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.

Infinity concepts (2012) Traditional Public Relations vs Modern PR Strategies, How Can you balance your PR effectiveness? Retrieved on 12/01/2020 from www.infinityconcepts.net

Kowal, E. (2016) what is Modern Public Relations? 15 definitions from Experienced PR Practitioners. Retrieved from http//www.prowly.com on 15/02/2018

Miller, K. L. (2015) Developing a Modern Public Relations Strategy. Retrieved from

http//www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com on 13/03/2018

Moguluwa, S. C. (2007). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategies and Applications in Modern Public Relations management. In Nwosu, I. E. (ed), *The Nigeria Perspectives of Public Relations*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Mohammed, B. K. (2013). Social Media, maintenance and creation of Social Relationships amongst Hausa Youths in Zaria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication,* 11 (1), 100-120.

Ndolo, I. S. (2005). *Mass Media Systems and Society*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Nkana, S. N. (2005). Public Relations in Television. *International Journal of Communication*, 2 (1), 67-73.

Nwammuo, A. (2011). Webcasting in the Era of Globalization: Implications for Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 3 (1), 50-58.

Ohaja, E. (2011). Trending Requirements for the next Generation of PR practitioners: An Analytical Discourse. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 3(1), 171-179.

Okoro, N. (2013). *The Business of Advertising (2nd ed)*. Lagos: St. Benedette Publishers.

Seiple, (2012). How to Leverage Social Media for Public Relations Success: Using Social Media to Generate Media Coverage and Improve Brand Sentiment. Retrieved on 13/01/2020 from http://cdn.2hubspot.net/53/file-13204195

Tine, V. A. (2014). Shifting Boundaries in Advertising and Public Relations Research in Nigeria: A must Do. *International Journal of Media, Security & Development* (IJMSD), 1(1), 83-91. Retrieved from www.data.worldbank.org on 16/05/2018.

Womboh, B. S. H. (2008). The State of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria University Libraries: The Experience of Ibrahim Babangida Library, Federal University of Technology, Yola; *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1(2), 25-32.