

# A Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method Approach to Understanding the Impact of Digital Media on Media Relations and Audience Engagement

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**Abstract:** *Digital media has disrupted the media landscape, enabling audiences to consume news and information through a variety of channels beyond traditional media outlets, such as social media, blogs, and podcasts. As a result of the diversity of information offered via digital media platforms, media practitioners have been able to appeal in different ways to members in the society to enhance relationships and actualize personal objectives. This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed method approach to investigate the impact of digital media on media relations and audience engagement. Findings from the survey carried out on media professionals revealed that a significant majority of respondents frequently utilize digital media metrics, such as engagement rates, reach, and sentiment analysis to gauge the effectiveness of their media strategies. Also, respondents generally find these metrics effective in capturing meaningful insights into audience behaviour, with a considerable portion viewing them as highly effective tools. However, challenges such as data interpretation difficulties due to lack of training and the lack of standardized metrics across platforms were identified as obstacles in fully leveraging digital metrics. participants noted opportunities such as improved audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and enhanced campaign evaluation, highlighting the potential of digital metrics to refine strategies and increase engagement. Results from the interviews further highlighted opportunities, specifically in areas like improved audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and enhanced campaign evaluation, all of which contribute to more precise and adaptive media strategies. The study, among other things, recommended that media organizations should provide comprehensive training on data interpretation and analytics to equip media professionals with the necessary skills to analyze and utilize digital media metrics effectively.*

**Keywords:** sequential explanatory mixed method, digital media, media relations, audience engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of Information and communication technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has necessitated the need for virtually all professions to adopt technology and digitalization to actualize organization goals and objectives. This is because to stay ahead of the curve and remain relevant in this highly volatile and competitive business environment in the world today, it is of utmost importance for organizations to utilize technology induced mechanisms which can play a pivotal role in ensuring success and stability of their business interests (Ezurike, 2023). It is of great pertinence to note that the practice of public relations is not spared of the adverse effects which can occur as a result of negligence to adapt digitalization into the practice of the profession. Fully aware of the evolving PR landscape as a result of technology, public relations practitioners over the years have seen technology as crucial and fundamental to business growth and the sustainability of the PR profession. This perhaps accounts for the reason why nowadays, modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data has been utilized in PR profession (Liew, 2021). These technologies have been used to monitor and analyze social media impressions, track performance results, tap into influencer marketing, increase visibility and maintain brand reputation.

In line with the above statement different empirical literatures such as Olayinka and Ewuola (2019) and Egwu et.al (2019) have stressed that as a result of the rapid changes in technology, public relations practitioners have adopted digital media as veritable communication tools to communicate to its publics. The foregoing implies that digitalization is important to the practice of public relations and PR practitioners are consistently adopting technology and social media to stay afloat and actualize organizational goals and objectives.

As an essential function of public relations, the importance of good media relations cannot be overemphasized. This is because, positive media relations can play a very crucial role in the overall growth of an organization (Etta, 2017). The power which the media wields in today's society in setting the agenda for public discussion, makes it imperative for companies to ensure good relationship and favourable reportage in the media in order to survive in the ever competitive business environment. As a result of this, many organizations have taken advantages of media relations to build brand awareness, increase credibility, manage crisis and build reputation.

Media relations has always been an essential function of public relations, aimed at building relationships and managing communication with journalists and media outlets (Krinyantono, 2019). The success of media relations efforts is often measured in terms of media coverage and impact, traditionally evaluated through metrics such as circulation, readership, and advertising equivalency. However, with the emergence of digital media, traditional media relations metrics are no longer sufficient to capture the full scope and influence of media coverage. Digital media has disrupted the media landscape, enabling audiences to consume news and information through a variety of channels beyond traditional media outlets, such as social media, blogs, and podcasts

(Alzubi, 2023). As a result, public relations professionals need to adapt their measurement and evaluation practices to capture the impact of media coverage across these new channels. In light of these considerations, this study seeks to:

- Assess the influence of digital media metrics on the evaluation of media relations and audience engagement
- Explore the perspectives of media and PR professionals on the challenges and opportunities digital media presents in measuring and evaluating media relations.

### **Public Relations and Digital Media**

Public relations can be defined as a deliberate and sustained effort to establish mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Explicating on the importance of public relations in an organization, Olayinka (2019) opined that public relations plays a pivotal role in enhancing cooperation between an organization and the public as PR provides an avenue for disseminating information to the public and also provides a mechanism for crisis management. The foregoing implies that public relations can provide insurmountable value in enabling progress in an organization.

It is noteworthy to say that, as a result of digitalization, the communication landscape is evolving to a digital direction and only those who possess the adequate skillsets and understand the ongoing digital transformation would be able to communicate effectively. This implies that, to stay relevant in the evolving communication era propelled by technology, public relations practitioners must understand digital transformation and adopt technology to ensure effective communication.

According to Das (2020), digital media refers to digitized content which can be transmitted over the internet or computer networks. They consist of audio, video and texts presented on a website, blog or social media platform.

Digital media have played an instrumental role in aiding communication in today's society. It has also been pivotal in the practice of public relations as it has created diverse opportunities for public relations practitioners to communicate to various demographics in today's society. In consonance with this viewpoint, Raudeliuniene et al. (2018), emphasized that digital metrics facilitate data-driven post-campaign analysis, allowing media professionals to measure success against predefined benchmarks and refine future strategies. As a result of the diversity of information offered via digital media platforms, PR practitioners have been able to appeal in different ways to members in the society to enhance relationships and actualize business objectives.

In line with the two-way symmetrical model of public relations which is hinged on dialogue, digital media has provided a mechanism for the PR practitioner in an organization and consumers to interact via social media platforms to ensure satisfaction and facilitate discussions which can prove

beneficial to both the organization and publics. Supporting the aforementioned statement, Egwu (2019) asserted that as a result of digitalization, individuals in the society are no longer consumers of media messages as digital media has enabled interactivity which creates an avenue for citizens in the society to become producers of media messages and texts.

With regards to Generation Z, who Csobonka (2016) referred to as “Digital natives” or the “iGeneration”, public relations practitioners can communicate and interact with this tech savvy demographic via social networking sites such as facebook, twitter, Instagram, amongst others. these interactions via digital media platforms can help in solving communication problems, misunderstanding and also avert potential conflicts between an organization and its publics. Once this is done, mutual understanding and good relationship between an organization and its publics would be achieved.

### **Media Relations**

Media relations is a very important component of PR. According to Supa and Zoch (2009) as cited in Wilson and Supa (2013), media relations is a systematic and planned mutually beneficial relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. Similarly, Daramola (2012) disclosed that media relations is the ability of the of organizations to cultivate the support of the press to its side. This perhaps accounts for the reason why Etta (2017) purported that the success of every PR activity is hinged on media relations as the media is the guarantor of the people’s right to know.

The goal of media relations is to communicate newsworthy messages or information from clients using the appropriate media outlets. These outlets could be newspapers, magazines, the electronic media and the internet. When this is done, the publics are aware of any information an organization wants to relay to them.

Media men are very vital to the discharge of the duties of every public relations communicator. This is because they are professionals with the appropriate training and channels to disseminate information to a large heterogenous audience. Journalists are also very important as a result of the roles in which they play in setting public agenda.

To ensure information get to its intended audience, it is imperative for every public relations practitioner to ensure cordial working relationships with the media. It is important for every PR practitioner to understand journalistic ethics as it is forbidden to use all sorts of gratifications to buy a newsman in order to get a story published. The public relations practice also abhors the conduct as it is unethical to indulge in any form of bribery in the discharge of one’s duties.

To ensure smooth and respectable media relations, the PR practitioner must anticipate the needs of the media and meet these needs affectively. Some of these needs are news worthy information which can be of utmost importance to both the media and the public. In addition, PR practitioners

must avoid manipulative messages and be transparent with the media in order to engage in constructive dialogue which can facilitate mutual understanding.

### **Digital Media and Media Relations**

The emergence of technology has affected the practice of media relations. The advent of the internet has resulted in a fundamental shift in media relations changing the way by which PR practitioners and journalists interact. This perhaps accounts for the reason why Wilson and Supa (2013) stressed that the practice of media relations is undergoing a major transformation as a result of the emergence of digital media technologies which can foster professional relationships amongst public relations practitioners and journalist. The foregoing implies that PR practitioners must accept that the traditional methods of media relations is becoming obsolete as a result of digitalization and nowadays journalists are seeking to foster relationships through valued information exchange propelled by technology.

The internet has played a pivotal role in promoting relationships between PR practitioners and journalists. Traditional modes of media relations are losing their dominance as both practitioners and journalists are consistently adopting new technologies to enhance interaction between one another. These new technologies include social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and these platforms have served as a veritable medium to enhance fast and effective communication between practitioners and journalists.

Digital media encourage a two-way symmetrical communication in media relations. The feedback mechanism provided by digital media platforms recognizes that the media and journalists are not just channels of information, but are active players in communication process and their interests and perspective must be respected by the organization and the PR practitioner.

Through interactions via digital media, an organization can enhance its credibility, manage reputation, seek feedbacks from the media and its audience and also provide a mechanism for the PR practitioner to evaluate the outcome of a particular media relations activity.

Media relations is evolving into a digitized activity. Therefore, practitioners must employ digital metrics to tailor content more precisely to audience interests in order to increase campaign relevance and impact (Khanom, 2023).

### **Traditional Metrics for Media Relations**

Traditional public relations refer to the usage of traditional media such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines and billboards to provide solutions to the communication and marketing goals of an organization. Before the emergence of the internet, public relations practitioners solely relied on the use of traditional media to actualize organizational objectives, but as a result of technological advancements happening in the world today, traditional PR is gradually becoming a thing of the past. Some of the traditional metrics for media relations includes:

**Potential Reach:** This measures the impact of a media message and indicates how many journalists read or viewed a particular PR activity. This metric is a key indicator in media relations as it provides a framework to explain how many media men have access to a particular PR effort. A large potential reach of PR efforts to journalists, can foster good media relations between practitioners and journalists which can in turn lead to favourable reportage for the organization a PR communicator is representing. A major limitation of this metric in traditional PR is the difficulty to track the reach because it does not provide a mechanism for one to use formula or digital analytics to measure readership and viewership.

**Media Mentions:** This measures the quantity and quality of mentions in traditional media. This metric implies that the since the goal of media relations is to gain visibility and favourable reportage in the press, the quantity and quality of information being disseminated in the press can be a good indicator of media relations. Applying this metric in traditional PR is an herculean task. This is because, as a result of the proliferation of media houses and the highly increasing number of journalists in the traditional media, it would be difficult to measure the quantity and quality of media messages without the aid of digital analytics.

**Share of Voice:** This is an assessment of the visibility and prominence of an organization in comparison to competitors across various media channels. This is a key indicator of media relations, since the success of media relations efforts is often measured in terms of media coverage and impact. This metric seeks to compare the percentage of media mentions between PR practitioner's client and competitors. This is also difficult to track without the aid of technological induced analytical tools.

### **Modern Metrics for Media Relations**

The advent of technology is changing the PR landscape. Over the years, journalist have often taken to social media to disseminate information via their social media platforms. This implies that, to foster good media relations, PR practitioners must also utilize social media to connect with journalists, track their views and reportage on an organization activity and also analyze their engagements and impressions to access their popularity. This can be achieved with the aid of modern analytics tools such as Google analytics, Shemrush, Meltwater, amongst others. Some of the modern metrics of media relations includes:

**Social Media Engagement:** Social media play a pivotal role in creating relationships with journalists. Social media can also be used to measure how journalists perceive a brand thus making it necessary to track the impressions and engagements of journalists. Social media analytics software's such as Sprout Social, Hootsuite, Zoho Social, amongst other can be used to track social media engagements of journalists in line with the objectives of media relations.

**Share of Voice:** This is another metric to measure the success of a public relations content before and after a digital campaign. This metric is used to discover how journalists consumes a brands information against its competitors. It could also entail performing a sentiment analysis to analyze the dispositions of journalist to a particular PR message. Using sentiment analysis, once can ascertain whether a journalist reaction to a brand message is positive, negative or neutral. AI based measurement tools such as Awario, Brandwatch, Talkwalker, amongst others can be used to measure share of voice and sentiments.

**Media Coverage:** Media coverage is arguably one of the best indicators of media relations. In this context, it refers to the amount of reportage carried on online media outlets. These online media outlets includes social media posts, podcasts appearances, Youtube coverage, influencer reportage, online publications, amongst others. Consistent and favourable reportage of an organizations activity via digital platforms is a good indicator of media relations.

### **Empirical Related Literature Review**

Chamblee (2022) opined there exist a symbiotic relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners as public relations department utilizes online publications written by journalists to track the organizations corporate image, media coverage and public perception. The study reviewed relevant empirical literature, case studies and introduced new methods highlighting the role of public relations practitioners in the digital media era. The study revealed that as a result of the changing PR landscape, gone are the days of writing press releases using traditional media, nowadays public relations practitioners are utilizing social media to disseminate information to its publics.

According to Etta (2017), the power of the media in todays society, makes it imperative for organizations to place communication at the centre of its business activities and sustain good relationship with media practitioners. The study, anchored on the media dependency theory, provided a framework for public relations practitioners to understand the impact of the media in influencing the publics and therefore admonished practitioners to engage in media relations in order to gain visibility and favourable reportage in the press.

Conducting a study on the impact of social media on public relations practice, Olayinka (2019) stressed that social media platforms have had tremendous impact on how public relations practitioners communicate as it facilitates seamless interactions between individuals and media organizations. Adopting the technological determinism theory and the survey research method, findings from this study revealed that through digital media platforms, media relations objectives have been attained as these platforms has been able to enhance relationships between PR practitioners and journalist which has in turn, led to favourable reportage in the press.

Egwu et.al (2019) sought to investigate the adoption level of digital media amongst public relations practitioners in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The researchers also sough to discover the aspects of public relations practice which has been influenced by digital media. The diffusion of innovations theory

was used to explain the crux of the study, while the focus group research method was used to elicit responses from participants sampled for this study. Findings from this study revealed that the adoption of digital media have influence the growth of public relations practice in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. Based on the findings gotten from this study, the researchers recommended that public relations units and information offices in virtually every organization should employ tech savvy personnel with adequate knowledge of digital media, whose job will be hinged on relaying information on social media platforms and blogs to enable the staff to remain connected so as to get first-hand information from their organization faster.

Inya (2017) assessed the influence of social media on public relations practices in universities in south-east, Nigeria. The study was anchored on the diffusion of innovation theory, the qualitative research design was adopted as the researcher used In-depth interviews as the research method. The purposive sampling technique was adopted by the researcher to select eight public relations practitioner from eight universities in south east, Nigeria to participate in the study. Findings from the study revealed that the frequency which the PR practitioners use the social media was not enough to generate backlinks needed to improve the global ranking of their universities. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that universities should employ personnel dedicated to managing their social media platforms under the supervision of their public relations units.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed methods research approach to examine the variables under investigation. Mixed methods research integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon and corroborate findings across methodologies (Ogunsanya et al., 2019). In this sequential explanatory design, quantitative data was collected and analyzed in the initial phase to examine how digital media metrics, such as engagement rates and reach, impact media relations evaluation. The second phase, involved the collection of qualitative data to investigate the perspectives of media and PR professionals on the challenges and opportunities digital metrics bring to media relations.

The survey was conducted on 205 media professionals and PR practitioners across in Lagos state Nigeria, as well as follow-up semi-structured interviews with 5 selected participants. The survey data captured quantitative trends in the use of digital metrics, while the interviews explored individual perceptions of challenges and opportunities digital metrics bring to media relations.



**RESULTS****Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 205)**

Socio-Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	126	61.5%
	Female	79	38.5%
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	8	3.9%
	1-3 years	47	22.9%
	4-7 years	71	34.6%
	8+ years	79	38.5%
Sector of Employment	Public Sector	19	9.3%
	Private Sector	186	90.7%

**Source: Survey, 2024**

The socio-demographic data of the respondents indicates a predominantly male sample, with the majority identifying as male. In terms of work experience, the largest group has 8+ years of experience, followed by those with 4-7 years, and a smaller proportion with 1-3 years or less than 1 year of experience. Regarding employment sector, the respondents are mostly employed in the private sector, with a much smaller proportion working in the public sector.

**Table 2: Assessing the influence of digital media on the evaluation of media relations and audience engagement**

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
How often do you use digital media metrics (e.g., engagement rates, reach) to evaluate media relations and audience engagement?	Very Often	72	35.1%
	Often	89	43.4%
	Occasionally	31	15.1%
	Rarely	10	4.9%
	Never	3	1.5%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>205</b>
Which digital media metrics do you find most useful for measuring impact?	Engagement Rates	103	50.2%
	Audience Reach	53	25.9%
	Sentiment Analysis	29	14.1%
	Click-Through Rates	11	5.4%
	Conversion Rates	7	3.4%
	Others	2	1%
	<b>Total</b>		<b>205</b>
How effective are digital media metrics (e.g., likes, shares) in capturing audience engagement?	Very Effective	68	33.2%
	Effective	77	37.6%
	Moderately Effective	39	19.0%
	Slightly Effective	15	7.3%
	Not Effective	6	2.9%
<b>Total</b>		<b>205</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Survey, 2024**

Table 2 reveals a significant majority of respondents frequently utilize digital media metrics, with many relying on these tools as essential in evaluating media relations and audience engagement. Most respondents report using metrics like engagement rates, reach, and sentiment analysis to gauge the effectiveness of their media strategies. Engagement rates stand out as the most valued metric, thus showing its perceived accuracy in capturing audience interaction and feedback. Also, respondents generally find these metrics effective in capturing meaningful insights into audience behaviour, with a considerable portion viewing them as highly effective tools. This widespread adoption and confidence in digital metrics highlight their crucial role in modern media evaluation, suggesting that organizations increasingly depend on quantitative data to shape and assess their audience engagement strategies.

## Results of Semi-Structured Interviews

The thematic analysis approach was adopted by the researcher to analyze qualitative data gathered from the selected respondents sampled for this study. From this analysis, two major themes emerged. The derived themes are:

- Challenges in Using Digital Media Metrics
- Opportunities in Utilizing Digital Media Metrics for Media Relations.

### Theme 1: Challenges in Using Digital Media Metrics

The theme 'challenges in using digital media metrics' explains the difficulties faced by media professionals when utilizing digital media metrics to evaluate media relations effectiveness. From the responses gathered, two subthemes within this theme emerged. They include difficulties in interpreting data and the lack of standardized metrics.

#### Subthemes

##### Difficulty in Interpreting Data

From the interview conducted, one of the most frequently mentioned challenges was the difficulty in interpreting the data provided by digital media metrics. Some respondents expressed frustration with the complexity of extracting meaningful insights from the numbers, particularly when trying to connect the metrics to specific outcomes or media strategies.

A participant shared:

*"I often find myself needing to dig deeper to understand what the metrics really mean, especially with engagement rates and sentiment analysis. It's not always straightforward."* (Participant 3).

Several participants expressed that their difficulty in interpreting data stemmed from not having the necessary knowledge or skills to interpret the data.

*"We don't have formal training on how to properly analyze digital metrics. I think if I knew more about how to interpret the data, I would be able to make better decisions."* (Participant 5).

Another participant echoed a similar sentiment stating:

*"I believe if I had more training, I could better understand the metrics, but right now, I feel like I'm just guessing most of the time."* (Participant 1).

Overall, participants disclosed that challenges such as the lack of formal training in digital media metrics, combined with the complexity of interpreting the data, were significant barriers to effectively using these tools.

### **Lack of Standardized Metrics**

A significant concern raised by respondents was the lack of standardized metrics across platforms. Many felt that the absence of uniform metrics made it difficult to compare data across different social media channels, leading to inconsistent evaluations audience engagement and media relations success.

A participant expressed frustration with the varying metrics across platforms, stating:

*“It’s confusing because every social media platform has its own way of measuring success. Facebook might have a different engagement metric compared to Twitter or Instagram. It makes it hard to know if our strategies are truly working, or if we’re just looking at data that’s not comparable.”* (Participant 2).

Another participant also highlighted the challenge of inconsistent metrics saying:

*“There’s no consistency across platforms, and it makes our analysis feel fragmented. You can’t really get a clear picture of how effective a campaign is because the metrics are all over the place. It’s like comparing apples to oranges, and it’s frustrating when you want to track performance accurately.”* (Participant 6).

The foregoing indicates that respondents face significant challenges in evaluating the effectiveness of their media strategies due to the lack of standardized metrics across different social media platforms. The varying methods of measurement make it difficult to compare data consistently, leading to confusion and fragmentation in performance analysis. As highlighted by the participants, the absence of uniformity in metrics such as engagement rates and reach across various platforms complicates the process of accurately assessing the success of campaigns. This lack of consistency not only hinders decision-making but also prevents professionals from obtaining a clear and reliable understanding of their media strategies' true impact.

### **Theme 2: Opportunities in Utilizing Digital Media Metrics for Media Relations and audience engagement**

The theme 'opportunities in utilizing digital media metrics for media relations' highlights the potential benefits that media professionals gain by leveraging digital media metrics to refine media strategies and enhance audience engagement. From the responses gathered, three subthemes within this theme emerged: improved audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and enhanced campaign evaluation.

#### **Subthemes**

##### **Improved Audience Targeting**

Participants highlighted the potential of digital media metrics to improve their understanding of audience behaviours and demographics, allowing for more precise targeting in media strategies.

A participant shared:

*"Digital metrics give us insights into who our audience really is. With this information, we can design content that directly speaks to their interests and needs, which makes our campaigns more impactful."* (Participant 4).

Another participant emphasized the benefit of demographic data, saying: *"With digital metrics, we can see specific details about our audience—like age, location, and even interests. It helps us craft messages that resonate with the right people at the right time."* (Participant 2).

### **Performance Insights**

Respondents also emphasized the advantage of using digital metrics to track the performance of media strategies in real time. The ability to monitor engagement as it happens allows professionals to quickly identify what's working and adjust strategies as needed, enhancing campaign responsiveness.

A participant explained:

*"One of the great things about digital metrics is that they show us what's working in real time. If something isn't performing as we hoped, we can quickly pivot and make changes."* (Participant 5).

Another respondent commented on the value of real-time feedback: *"Being able to see immediate results means we can optimize on the spot, rather than waiting until the campaign ends. It's like having a live focus group for each campaign."* (Participant 1).

### **Enhanced Campaign Evaluation**

Digital media metrics also present opportunities for more thorough and objective campaign evaluation, allowing media professionals to assess the success of their strategies against specific benchmarks and objectives. Respondents noted that this kind of evaluation helps them refine future campaigns based on past performance, ensuring continuous improvement.

A participant described this advantage, noting:

*"Metrics allow us to see what really resonates with our audience and what doesn't. Reviewing the numbers post-campaign helps us learn and get better with each new effort."* (Participant 6).

Another participant shared a similar perspective, saying:

*"Looking back at the metrics after a campaign wraps up gives us clear indicators of what worked and what didn't. This insight is invaluable for planning future strategies."* (Participant 2).

Overall, this theme and its subthemes emphasize the significant advantages that digital media metrics provide in enhancing media relations effectiveness. Through proper utilization of

technology for improved audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and enhanced campaign evaluation, media professionals can make data-driven decisions to actualize their goals.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The influence of digital media on the evaluation of media relations and audience engagement**

The study sought to explore the influence of digital media on the evaluation of media relations and audience engagement, focusing on how practitioners utilize digital metrics to assess the effectiveness of their media strategies. Findings revealed that a significant majority of respondents frequently rely on digital metrics, with engagement rates, reach, and sentiment analysis identified as essential tools in evaluating media relations. This finding is in congruence with the view of This of Wilson and Supa (2013) who stressed that the practice of media relations is undergoing a major transformation as a result of the emergence of digital media technologies.

Results also showed that respondents generally view these metrics as effective in capturing meaningful insights into audience behaviour, with a considerable portion perceiving them as highly effective tools. This aligns with the empirical findings of Egwu et al., (2019), who espoused that digital media metrics offer a data-driven approach to media evaluation, allowing practitioners to gain real-time insights into audience engagement and sentiment.

Overall, the findings revealed the crucial role digital metrics play in modern media evaluation, supporting the view that organizations increasingly depend on quantitative data to shape and assess audience engagement strategies.

### **Challenges in Using Digital Media Metrics**

The study also investigated the challenges that media professionals encounter when using digital media metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of media relations. Findings revealed two primary challenges: difficulties in interpreting data and the lack of standardized metrics across platforms. Results showed that many respondents struggle with interpreting the data provided by digital media metrics. The complexity of these metrics often leaves practitioners unsure of how to draw actionable insights from engagement rates, reach, and sentiment analysis. The lack of formal training among practitioners emerged as another challenge, as respondents indicated that they would benefit from specialized training to enhance their understanding and use of these metrics. Also, the absence of standardized metrics across platforms emerged as a significant barrier, with respondents noting that inconsistent metrics hinder their ability to perform accurate comparisons.

### **Opportunities in Utilizing Digital Media Metrics for Media Relations and Audience Engagement**

The study also assessed the potential advantages that media professionals gain by leveraging digital media metrics to refine their strategies and increase audience engagement. Findings

revealed three primary opportunities: improved audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and enhanced campaign evaluation.

Results showed that digital media metrics significantly enhance audience targeting, enabling professionals to gain insights into audience behaviours and demographics, leading to more effective message delivery. This aligns with the findings of Khanom (2023), who noted that digital metrics empower practitioners to tailor content more precisely to audience interests, ultimately increasing campaign relevance and impact.

The ability to track real-time performance also emerged as a key opportunity, as participants emphasized how digital metrics allow for immediate feedback on strategy effectiveness. This finding supports Olayinka (2019) argument that real-time analytics enable professionals to monitor and adjust campaigns dynamically, making them more responsive to audience reactions.

Lastly, enhanced campaign evaluation was identified as a major benefit, as digital media metrics provide an objective basis for assessing campaign success. This finding is consistent with the work Raudeliuniene et al. (2018), who emphasized that digital metrics facilitate data-driven post-campaign analysis, allowing media professionals to measure success against predefined benchmarks and refine future strategies.

Overall, these findings highlight the substantial advantages of digital media metrics in improving media relations and audience engagement. Through enhanced audience targeting, real-time performance tracking, and thorough campaign evaluation, media professionals are equipped to make data-driven decisions that align with their strategic objectives and enhance the effectiveness of their media strategies.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study concludes that digital media plays a vital role in enhancing media relations and audience engagement by providing media professionals with data-driven insights for audience targeting, real-time performance insights, and comprehensive campaign evaluation. However, while digital metrics offer substantial advantages, challenges such as data interpretation difficulties and the lack of standardized metrics across platforms can also affect the accuracy and consistency of media strategy assessments. Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- Media organizations should provide formal training on digital metrics analysis to equip media professionals with the necessary skills for accurate data interpretation and application.
- Organizations should adopt analytics tools that simplify data interpretation, helping professionals better understand audience behaviours and campaign impact.

- Media professionals should make the most of real-time insights to pivot and optimize media strategies promptly, increasing campaign responsiveness and effectiveness.
- Organizations should implement structured post-campaign review sessions to assess metric data against goals, refine strategies, and ensure continuous improvement in media engagement outcomes.

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