

EXAMINING ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN POLARIS BANK'S BRAND TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

¹Taiwo Peter AJAYI, PhD; ²Emmanuel SIJUADE. PhD; ³Adesoye Sunday AJAYI

¹Department of Information Science and Media Studies
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.
(Research Fellow, INTI International University, Malaysia)
Email: tpajayi@oauife.edu.ng reverendkool266@gmail.com
Tel: +2347047522077

²Department of Mass Communication
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State
eosijuade@oauife.edu.ng

³Department of Mass Communication
Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji
Email: adesoyejayil@gmail.com
+2348066276286

Abstract

In recent years, social media has emerged as a vital tool for public relations practice, particularly within the banking sector where effective communication and stakeholder engagement are critical. Despite growing scholarly attention to social media in public relations, limited studies have examined its strategic role in corporate repositioning within Nigerian banks, especially in the transition from Skye Bank to Polaris Bank. This study therefore investigates how social media platforms were utilized as strategic public relations tools in the corporate repositioning of Polaris Bank PLC. A qualitative exploratory design was adopted, with data collected through in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected public relations professionals in Polaris Bank branches in Ondo State. The findings reveal that platforms such as *X (formerly Twitter)*, *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and *LinkedIn* were actively deployed to enhance communication, engage stakeholders, and manage public perception. Key factors influencing their use include real-time feedback, wider audience reach, and improved interaction with customers. The study concludes that social media played a significant role in strengthening Polaris Bank's corporate repositioning efforts. It recommends a more structured and strategic integration of digital platforms in public relations practice to enhance organisational visibility and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: Social media, Public relations, Polaris bank, Corporate repositioning, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The growing integration of social media into public relations strategies has significantly transformed communication practices across various industries, particularly in the banking sector. Today, social media stands as a vital instrument in contemporary business operations. In addition, the adoption of this media vehicle has been widely embraced by governments, corporations, and financial institutions for purposes such as improving customer satisfaction, facilitating timely communication, sharing information effectively, and raising public awareness (Ajayi, Akintayo, Akota & Ajayi, 2024). When banks successfully align their social media presence with broader public relations goals, they can deepen engagement with stakeholders and effectively communicate their core mission, vision, and values. Notwithstanding, organisations now employ social media tools to create and maintain relationships with

their stakeholders (Sharma, 2022). This underscores the powerful role of social media in shaping public perception and influencing opinion.

Notwithstanding, public relations professionals play an essential role in fostering and maintaining positive connections between banks and their diverse stakeholders, particularly customers. As customer bases expand, maintaining a favorable public image becomes increasingly important. Public relations act as a strategic tool that organisations, governments, and prominent individuals use to manage their image and steer public sentiment (Cronin, 2018). A strong relationship with the community enhances the potential for favorable outcomes, especially when sound public relations strategies are implemented. To achieve their communication and organisational objectives, public relations practitioners draw on a range of tools and platforms, with social media at the forefront. Platforms such as *Facebook*, *X (formerly Twitter)*, and *YouTube* have become integral to how professionals connect with audiences (Achor, Nwachukwu, & Nkwocha, 2014). Communication scholars have observed that the traditional media landscape has been significantly reshaped by the advent of digital platforms, influencing how public relations campaigns are designed and executed. In this context, social media not only complements traditional tools but also strengthens trust and credibility among the bank's stakeholders.

The emergence of social media has redefined public engagement, offering public relations professionals new channels for real-time, two-way communication. Despite these opportunities, public relations officers in the banking industry face challenges in adapting to this evolving landscape. These include keeping up with rapid technological changes, managing interactions with non-traditional media actors, and maintaining a consistent and positive image in a digital-first world. As the industry becomes more interconnected and globally responsive, banks must continuously evolve their communication strategies to remain effective and relevant in the age of social media.

Trust is a fundamental pillar of the banking industry, as customers place significant confidence in financial institutions to manage and safeguard their assets. The success of any bank is closely tied to the level of trust it commands from the public in handling financial transactions efficiently and transparently. Public relations play a pivotal role in nurturing this trust by promoting mutual understanding between the bank and its stakeholders. Through clear and consistent communication, public relations help mitigate issues such as misinformation, public scepticism, and disengagement, thereby reinforcing the institution's credibility and long-term reputation.

The Nigerian banking sector offers a notable example of how public relations can support institutional stability, especially during periods of financial reform. During the recapitalisation era between 2004 and 2012, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) initiated policies aimed at resolving widespread insolvency within the sector (Soludo, 2004; Sanusi, 2010; Gololo, 2018). This restructuring led to a wave of mergers, acquisitions, and in some cases, the closure of failing banks. In response to the resulting communication challenges, many banks established or expanded their corporate communications departments to manage stakeholder relations more effectively during this turbulent period. These departments played a vital role in maintaining customer confidence amid uncertainty, demonstrating the importance of strategic public relations in times of institutional change.

Given these insights, banks should invest in creating a customer-friendly atmosphere, particularly during face-to-face interactions at physical branches. By fostering positive engagement and prioritising customer satisfaction, public relations professionals can contribute significantly to enhancing the bank's image and reinforcing public trust in its services.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing adoption of social media in public relations practice has generated significant scholarly interest, particularly in relation to its role in organisational communication and stakeholder engagement in the banking industry. Ogbu (2019) noted that in today's digital age where the public is fast becoming more discerning, active, educated, publicly related and socially connected, public relations must either transform its practice or prepare for burial. Several studies have examined the impact of social media on information management (Achor et al., 2014), social change (Adegbilero-Iwari, Fasae, & Subair, 2021), financial fraud mitigation (Ajayi et al., 2024), and media relations (Sharma, 2022). These studies collectively highlight the growing relevance of digital platforms in contemporary public relations practice. However, despite these contributions, there is limited empirical attention on how social media has been strategically deployed in corporate repositioning within the Nigerian banking sector. More specifically,

the transition from Skye Bank to Polaris Bank represents a critical case of organisational rebranding and restructuring that required deliberate communication strategies to manage public perception and rebuild trust. Yet, existing studies have not sufficiently examined how social media was utilised during this transition, particularly in terms of content strategy, stakeholder engagement, and feedback mechanisms. This gap creates a need for a focused investigation into how social media platforms were employed as public relations tools in the repositioning of Polaris Bank. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of social media in facilitating effective communication, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and supporting corporate transformation within the bank.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the various social media platforms adopted by public relations officers in the effort to reposition Polaris Bank.
2. To explore the reasons behind the preference for specific social media tools used by public relations professionals in the repositioning process.
3. To evaluate the extent to which the use of social media has contributed to the achievement of public relations goals in the context of Polaris Bank's corporate repositioning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Public Relations

Public relations plays a pivotal role in shaping how organisations are perceived by their various stakeholders, particularly in the areas of reputation management, crisis communication, and relationship building. Rather than being a static concept, public relations has evolved into a dynamic and multifaceted discipline, reflecting changes in communication practices and organisational environments. Early scholarly work by Grunig and Hunt (1984) conceptualizes public relations as the strategic management of communication between an organisation and its publics, emphasizing its managerial and relational dimensions. Building on this foundation, L'Etang (2013) expands the scope by highlighting its role in managing organisational reputation and stakeholder relationships through activities such as corporate communication, issues management, and social responsibility initiatives. In a similar vein, Jane and Clara (2009) frame public relations as a purposeful and strategic communication process designed to influence public perception and shape attitudes toward organisations, brands, and individuals. Collectively, these perspectives underscore public relations as a strategic, relationship-oriented function that integrates communication, management, and societal engagement.

Jesper (2011) stresses the importance of reputation management, noting that public relations ensures an organisation's message is delivered effectively to its intended audience. In the same vein, Stacks (2011) argues that public relations is vital in shaping trust, credibility, and the public image of a company. Krishnamurthy and Dejan (2009) add a cultural dimension, emphasizing that strategic communication in public relations must consider and connect with diverse cultural audiences. Poepsel and VanSlette (2026), explained that a public relations professional is a conduit, a facilitator, and a manager of communication. The primary work consists of conducting research, defining problems, and creating meaning by fostering communication among groups in society. An early but influential definition by Edward Bernays considered one of the founding figures of public relations frames the practice as a managerial function. According to Bernays (1945), public relations involves assessing public attitudes, developing relevant policies and strategies, and executing communication programs aimed at gaining public understanding and support. His definition emphasises the importance of a structured approach to relationship-building between organisations and their various publics.

In the context of the banking industry, public relations plays a crucial role in promoting a bank's success through three main avenues: establishing and maintaining strong stakeholder relationships, enhancing public perception, and implementing crisis communication strategies to safeguard institutional stability. As noted by Daramola and Folayan (2013), well-executed public relations strategies can benefit banks by drawing in new customers through targeted campaigns, retaining current clients via engagement and loyalty initiatives, and improving internal morale through effective employee communication. Ultimately, public relations professionals contribute significantly to a bank's long-term reputation and profitability

by aligning corporate practices with both stakeholder expectations and broader societal values.

Overview of Social Media

Social media has evolved alongside the internet, especially with the rise of Web 2.0, which focused on interactivity, participation, and user-generated content. Unlike traditional mass media, which is centralized and hierarchical, social media allows for decentralized, many-to-many communication. Some scholars call social media a form of “liberation technology” because it increases participation and lowers traditional barriers (Diamond, 2010; Shirky, 2011). Still, this view is debated, as issues like misinformation, surveillance, and platform control challenge its role as a tool for empowerment.

Researchers define social media in several ways. Mbaeri (2022) sees it as a computer-based technology that helps people share ideas, thoughts, and information through online networks and communities, focusing on its technical and communication aspects. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as internet applications based on Web 2.0, highlighting how users create and share content. Manning (2014) looks at its cultural and social side, calling social media a new form of media marked by active user involvement and interaction. As noted by Adegbilero-Iwari, Fasae, and Subair (2021), social media enables real-time communication and provides immediate feedback, making it an invaluable tool for dynamic exchanges of ideas, opinions, experiences, and worldviews. In this sense, social media functions as both a communication medium and a participatory platform.

This implies that social media can summarily be defined as a type of media vehicle that is an effective instrument of communication and information sharing, which has made users become sources of information online through the sharing of ideologies, views, opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with instant feedback. While these definitions highlight different dimensions not limited to technological, structural, and socio-cultural, they collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of social media. Rather than viewing social media solely as a tool, it is more analytically productive to understand it as a dynamic environment where technological affordances and social practices intersect, shaping communication patterns and influencing broader societal processes.

With platforms such as WhatsApp and others attracting billions of active users worldwide, social media has firmly established itself as a critical channel for information dissemination and public engagement. For public relations practitioners, especially in the banking sector, these platforms offer a direct line to clients, allowing for timely interactions and access to valuable customer feedback. The growing relevance of social media in both public relations and banking is reflected in the wide range of tools now employed ranging from social networking sites, mobile applications, blogs, and business networks, to forums, microblogs, photo and video sharing platforms, social bookmarking, product review sites, online gaming communities, and virtual environments.

One of the key benefits of social media in the context of banking public relations is its ability to bypass traditional communication barriers. These digital platforms allow for more personal, immediate, and interactive connections with customers. In the past, banks often depended on structured research methods to understand customer sentiments. Today, however, customers freely express their experiences and opinions through blogs, social networks, and microblogging platforms—transforming how banks receive and respond to feedback. This shift has significantly reshaped communication practices in the industry, allowing institutions to build more transparent and responsive relationships with the public.

Social media tools utilised by public relations professionals

Professionals in the public relations industry make use of many platforms for communication on social media. According to Reshma and Sabu (2024), social media is an important tool for PR because it allows you to reach audiences that previously may have been difficult to interact with. This means that with social media, the world is quite literally at your fingertips. Similarly, Breakenridge (2012), social media and public relations have converged into one mutually inclusive phenomenon where communication and technology intersect. Social media tools allow conversation at almost every stage of communication thereby making everyone a content producer. Breakenridge also notes that transparency is possible with the use of social media tools. Going off what Reshma and Sabu (2024); Breakenridge (2012) said, social media tools are used by public relations professionals to engage their audiences and reach out to their publics as well as push information out. To remain visible online and on social media sites, PR professionals use an arsenal of social media tools to reach their audiences. Some of these platforms include

Facebook, WhatsApp, X (Twitter), blogs and Microblogging.

Using Facebook, an organisation can create pages that people can like and interact with the content that the organization posts. Organizations can upload videos/images and have real-time comments on the post. Through WhatsApp, one can keep in close contact with their publics as they can easily send private messages or create groups to communicate. X can also be used by organizations to keep their publics informed through newsletters and communication. These are quick means of communication and can be used by organizations especially in times of crisis.

Blogs on the other hand can be used to shape the narrative. They give an opportunity for an organization to provide in-depth content about an issue. Microblogging platforms such as Instagram can be used to position the organization on certain issues and over time change how the public perceive certain topics.

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking platform boasting approximately 3.07 billion active users globally (Facebook Users Statistics, 2026). This marks an increase compared to the December 2017 figure of around 2.13 billion users worldwide (Facebook, 2018). As of July 2021, the platform had 2.85 billion followers, representing over 60% of all social network users globally, as reported by Shmalenko, Yefteni, and Semnets-Orlova (2021). In Nigeria, there were over 38.65 million Facebook users as of April 2024 (Statista, April 2024). Facebook has become a central platform for social interaction and engagement. India leads with the highest number of active users at over 375 million, followed by the United States with 194.1 million users. In Africa, Nigeria ranks 12th, boasting over 38.4 million users (Meta, Facebook Statista.com, ITU, World Bank, 2024). This marks a significant increase from 2017, when Facebook had around 2.13 billion users worldwide (Facebook, 2018). Originally designed to connect friends and family, Facebook has evolved into a vital tool for public relations professionals and banks, facilitating information sharing, customer engagement, and valuable feedback. As social media and instant messaging continue to weave into everyday communication, platforms like Facebook offer new opportunities for interaction in both public relations and the banking industry.

WhatsApp

Launched in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, WhatsApp is a cross-platform messaging service owned by Meta (formerly Facebook). WhatsApp allows users to send messages without incurring SMS charges and supports features like group messaging, video and audio sharing, and multimedia communication. As of April 2024, WhatsApp has surpassed 4 billion users globally and is the most widely used social media app in Nigeria, with over 95% of internet users between 16 and 64 years actively engaged on the platform (Meta, 2024). Its capacity for instant messaging and real-time information sharing has made it an essential tool for public relations and interactive conversations.

X (Formerly Twitter)

X is a widely recognized social media platform that was previously referred to as Twitter. It serves as a venue for discussing various topics and currently has over 557 million monthly active users (MAU). This positions X as the 15th most utilized social media platform globally (Demandsage, 2025). X, previously known as Twitter, is a prominent microblogging and social networking platform with over 353.9 million users as of 2023. Founded by Jack Dorsey in 2006, the platform was rebranded as X in 2023 under the leadership of Elon Musk. X allows users to share brief messages (tweets), usually capped at 140 characters, that can be immediately shared. Since its creation, the platform has experienced substantial growth, reaching over 645 million active users by 2014 (Twitter.com, 2014).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn, established in 2003, is a social networking site specifically tailored for professionals. As of January 2025, LinkedIn boasts over 1.1 billion members globally (LinkedIn, 2025). The United States leads in membership, with around 234 million users. Launched in 2003, LinkedIn has become the leading professional networking site, with more than 930 million users as of 2023. The platform is particularly favored by CEOs, business leaders, and professionals seeking networking opportunities and career advancement. LinkedIn enables users to create professional profiles akin to resumes that highlight their educational background, job experience, and skills (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Bradley, 2011). Unlike other

social networks, LinkedIn's focus on professional connections offers valuable opportunities for business networking and career growth.

Blogs

Blogs have emerged as a significant tool in public relations, enabling organizations to communicate more effectively with their audiences. As of 2026, there are more than 600 million blogs globally, constituting 31.6% of the total 1.9 billion websites. Tumblr currently leads with 518 million blogs. These blogs encompass a wide array of topics, from personal reflections to corporate communications across diverse niches, resulting in 7.5 million posts each day over 2.7 billion annually. The typical length of a blog article is 1,416 words (TechNews, 2026). They serve as valuable tools for businesses, allowing them to engage in two-way communication with stakeholders and directly interact with customers, employees, and other key audiences (Du & Wagner, 2006). The rise of video blogs has been particularly notable, as they have become an essential trend in content creation (Baxter & Connolly, 2013). Blogs offer businesses a platform for dialogue, providing insights, sharing expertise, and receiving feedback from audiences.

The Significance of Social Media and Public Relations in Banking Institutions

Fitch (2017) asserts that social media serves as a powerful tool for increasing visibility, allowing industries to adopt informal public relations strategies to promote their products and messages. This shift in communication dynamics has introduced new approaches to public engagement, where feedback is immediate and the expectations of objectivity, relevance, and timeliness diverge from traditional media standards. Banks, including those in Nigeria, have increasingly adopted social media platforms like X and Facebook, reflecting the growing importance of these tools in public relations. Social media allows for more personal and direct connections between banks and their customers, creating a more humanized approach to interactions. As Mogos (2011) suggests, social media helps bridge the gap between businesses and consumers by fostering more direct and relatable communication.

Public relations in the banking sector is crucial for addressing various communication challenges. Banks must rely on public relations services to conduct proactive research, monitor stakeholder perceptions, manage financial news releases, handle media inquiries, foster customer relationships, and ensure effective public discourse to combat misinformation. Additionally, Anyanwu (2012) highlights the decline in public trust in banks, due to factors such as poor service delivery and ineffective management. Public relations plays a critical role in counteracting these issues by raising awareness about opportunities in the banking sector and combating misconceptions that may deter potential customers.

In conclusion, the growing use of social media in Nigerian banks underscores the importance of integrating these platforms into strategic public relations efforts, especially in public administration sectors.

Corporate Communications Departments in Nigerian Banks (Polaris Bank)

The development of Corporate Communications departments in Nigerian banks traces back to the creation of Public Relations (PR) units in what Dangogo (2008) refers to as the "Old Big Four" banks—First Bank, Union Bank, United Bank for Africa, and Afribank. The British Bank of West Africa Limited, which later became First Bank of Nigeria Plc., established its PR department in 1956, aiming to enhance public engagement (Otubajo, Amuyo, & Melewar, 2009). During the bank recapitalisation reforms, there was a marked increase in the use of PR, Corporate Communications, and Integrated Marketing Communication strategies, which played a vital role in shaping the public image of banks and supporting their restructuring efforts. For example, Union Bank of Nigeria Plc. established a PR office in response to the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Act, which required Barclays Bank International to divest equity to Nigerian stakeholders before 1978 (Dangogo, 2008).

In more recent years, Polaris Bank has demonstrated the strategic application of corporate communication through its Media Relations Unit within the Corporate Communications and Brand Management Department. This unit employs various PR strategies, including personality profiling and highlighting professional achievements, to increase the bank's visibility and position it as a trusted authority in sectors such as investment, corporate banking, and project finance. These efforts contribute to building a positive public image and establishing the bank as a leader in its field.

Theoretical Framework

This research is framed within the Theory of Uses and Gratification, which was first introduced in 1974 by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch. This theory seeks to explain that media audiences are not passive consumers of content; rather, they actively seek out media that meet their needs and interests. As outlined by Defleur and Dennis (1994), the theory asserts that individuals make purposeful choices about the types of media content they engage with, driven by personal needs and motivations. Applied to the context of this study, it acknowledges that users of social media platforms are not merely passive recipients but actively engage with content for various purposes, such as social interaction, business promotion, and decision-making. For banks, social media offers a vital space to interact directly with customers, address inquiries, and resolve misconceptions related to their services or brand.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a case study design. Qualitative methodology was deemed fit for the study because of the ability to gather information about participants' experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and communication approaches. The study setting consists of purposively selected branches of Polaris Bank located in Ondo State. Ondo State was purposively selected because it has both semi-urban and rural communities that would help understand how organisations contextualize social media platforms according to the access level of their stakeholders. Three banks' branches were selected from Ondo State to make sure each branch was as contextually different as possible. Akure was one of the selected branches alongside Ondo town and Owo branches. Participants were conveniently selected using purposive sampling technique. Twelve participants working in the field of public relations, corporate communications, or customer engagement with at least a year's experience in the industry and currently use social media platform or manages social media pages were included in the study. Convenience sampling was employed until data saturation, and no new theme was revealed from the interviews with additional participants. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews based on the interview protocol developed for the study which was guided by the study objectives. Interviews were done face-to-face/virtually and took 30-45 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded with permission and field notes were taken. Interview questions were designed in two parts; the first part asked participants to provide demographics. The second part were based on themes that emerged from the literature review which include modes of social media, factors that influence choice of platform, social media roles that enhance public relations among others. Data were analysed using thematic analysis method. The transcripts were read line-by-line to generate codes and themes. Member checking, peer debriefing, and rich thick description were used as measures to increase credibility of the study.

Research Question One: What social media platforms do public relations officers utilize in the repositioning of Polaris Bank PLC?

The interview responses indicated that public relations officers at Polaris Bank predominantly use several social media platforms to support the bank's repositioning efforts. Among these platforms, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram emerged as the most frequently utilised tools. Other platforms like Blogs, YouTube Ads, and LinkedIn also featured prominently in the bank's public relations strategy. The officers reported engaging with these platforms on a daily basis, staying informed on the latest trends and leveraging the content to enhance their communication strategies. Most participants indicated that public relations officers at Polaris Bank utilise a diverse range of social media platforms including X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and LinkedIn as part of their broader communication strategy. However, rather than functioning as uniform channels, these platforms appear to serve distinct strategic purposes. As participant one (PR1) explained, "*X is where we engage customers instantly, especially when they have complaints. It's more of a response tool than just posting content.*" This suggests that certain platforms, particularly X, are prioritised for real-time interaction and customer service responsiveness.

While there was general agreement on the importance of maintaining an active digital presence, participants expressed nuanced views regarding the specific roles of different platforms. For example, participant 3 highlighted the multifunctional nature of LinkedIn, noting that "*LinkedIn is not just for public visibility; internally, we use it to track staff development and even identify potential recruits.*" This reflects how LinkedIn operates as both an external branding tool and an internal communication and monitoring mechanism within the organisation.

In terms of frequency of engagement, several participants emphasised the expectation of daily activity as a demonstration of consistency and visibility. Participant 2 remarked that *“we try to stay active every day so customers know we are always available.”* However, this view was not entirely uniform. One participant (participant 5) introduced a contrasting perspective, explaining that *“there are times when maintaining daily engagement is difficult due to workload or internal approvals.”* This divergence highlights an important tension between organisational expectations for constant online presence and the practical constraints faced by communication teams. Overall, the findings suggest that Polaris Bank’s use of social media is not merely habitual

In summary, public relations officers at Polaris Bank primarily use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and LinkedIn. These platforms are monitored regularly, with Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram being the most frequently utilized. Although other social media channels are also part of the bank’s strategy, they are not used as extensively as the aforementioned platforms. This aligns with findings by Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair (2014), who suggest that companies actively build their fan bases and cultivate engagement on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn by investing in these channels and collaborating with influencers to boost brand loyalty and consumer engagement.

Research Question Two: What factors prompted public relations officers of Polaris Bank to utilize their preferred social media platforms during the repositioning of Polaris Bank PLC?

Participants described the use of social media at Polaris Bank as highly strategic, with different platforms serving distinct communication functions rather than operating as uniform channels. Facebook, for instance, was consistently identified as a primary platform for promotional messaging and customer issue resolution. As participant one (PR1) explained, *“We use Facebook mainly to announce promotions and also respond to customer complaints because it allows us to reach a broad audience at once.”* This suggests that Facebook functions as both a dissemination and service recovery tool, combining marketing communication with customer relationship management.

In contrast, X (formerly Twitter) was characterised as a platform for immediacy and real-time responsiveness, particularly in handling urgent financial concerns. According to participant 8, *“For urgent issues like charges or failed transactions, we rely on X because we can respond quickly and even spot patterns in complaints.”* This highlights the platform’s role not only in rapid response but also in identifying recurring issues, thereby supporting more proactive problem-solving strategies.

Participants also indicated that demographic insights significantly influenced platform prioritisation. Reflecting on the transition from Skye Bank to Polaris Bank, participant 3 noted that *“we realised a large portion of our customers were younger, which made Instagram a key platform for us.”* This strategic shift underscores the role of audience segmentation in digital communication planning. Instagram, in particular, was described as an effective engagement tool due to its visual orientation and less intrusive advertising style. As participant 3 further explained, *“our ads on Instagram are subtle, so customers don’t feel overwhelmed, and the engagement is actually higher there.”* This suggests that content design and platform affordances are deliberately aligned to enhance user experience and interaction.

However, while participants generally emphasised the effectiveness of these platforms, differences emerged in how success is evaluated. Rather than relying solely on surface-level metrics such as likes or follower counts, several participants stressed the importance of deeper engagement indicators. Participant 4 stated that *“we focus more on brand awareness, reach, and recall because those tell us if people are actually connecting with the brand.”* This reflects a more sophisticated understanding of digital performance measurement, aligning social media strategy with broader organisational objectives such as brand repositioning.

Beyond platform-specific functions, participants widely acknowledged the transformative role of social media in service delivery within the banking sector. As participant 5 explained, *“before now, customers had to visit branches for simple issues, but social media allows us to resolve many of these remotely.”* This shift illustrates how digital platforms have redefined customer interaction by increasing accessibility and efficiency. Importantly, participants also linked this capability to reputational management, noting that timely and transparent responses on social media can help mitigate negative perceptions during crises.

Nevertheless, while most participants highlighted the benefits of social media, there was an implicit recognition that its effectiveness depends on active monitoring and strategic use. Social media was described not only as a communication tool but also as a source of valuable consumer insights. Participant 5 observed that *“by tracking conversations online, we can understand what customers want and adjust our services accordingly.”* This indicates that social media plays a dual role facilitating communication while simultaneously informing organisational decision-making through real-time feedback and sentiment analysis.

Overall, the findings reveal that social media use at Polaris Bank is both strategically differentiated and insight-driven, with platforms selected and utilised based on their unique affordances, audience demographics, and communication objectives. At the same time, variations in participant responses highlight the practical and strategic considerations that shape how these tools are implemented in everyday public relations practice.

Research question three: In what ways has the use of social media contributed to the achievement of public relations goals in the repositioning of Polaris Bank?

This section of the research provides a detailed analysis of how social media has contributed to achieving public relations objectives, particularly in terms of communication with customers during the repositioning of Polaris Bank. The third theme of the study explores the role of social media in enhancing public relations and is divided into two subthemes: feedback and activities.

In terms of feedback, public relations officers at Polaris Bank emphasized the substantial volume of responses they receive from customers, particularly on platforms like Twitter. The participants noted that social media has created an open line of communication, allowing customers to express their concerns, provide suggestions, and engage directly with the bank. This immediacy of feedback has proven invaluable, as it enables the bank to respond swiftly and effectively to customer inquiries and issues.

Findings from the interviews suggest that social media played a significant, though not uniform, role in Polaris Bank’s repositioning process. While several participants emphasised its importance for real-time engagement, their accounts reveal subtle differences in how platforms were utilised and perceived.

For instance, one public relations officer (participant 1) described Twitter as central to the bank’s communication strategy, noting that *“X has become an indispensable tool for us, not just for announcing updates, but for addressing concerns and receiving real-time feedback.”* This view was echoed by participant 12, who highlighted the immediacy of customer interactions, explaining that *“the speed of response on Twitter allows us to resolve issues before they escalate.”* These responses suggest that Twitter functions not only as a broadcast channel but also as an interactive feedback loop, enabling rapid responsiveness.

However, not all participants framed social media in equally transformative terms. Participant 5, for example, acknowledged its usefulness but pointed out operational constraints: *“Sometimes the volume of messages can be overwhelming, and not every complaint can be handled as quickly as customers expect.”* This introduces an important tension between the expectation of immediacy and the institutional capacity to deliver consistent responses.

Across interviews, participants consistently linked social media engagement with enhanced customer trust, particularly during the repositioning phase. Participant 11 explained that *“responding publicly to complaints shows transparency, and that helps customers feel more confident in the brand.”* This suggests that visibility of interaction rather than merely responsiveness plays a role in shaping perceptions of credibility. In this sense, social media operates as a performative space where customer service is not only delivered but also publicly demonstrated.

The repositioning process itself appeared to generate increased customer engagement, especially on X. According to participant 4, *“people were curious and sometimes sceptical about the changes, so they went online to ask questions and share opinions.”* This surge in feedback was not merely informational but also evaluative, providing the bank with insights into customer sentiment. As participant 1 noted, *“we used the feedback to adjust how we communicated certain changes and clarify misunderstandings.”* Here, social media becomes a site of iterative learning, where organisational messaging is refined in response to audience reactions.

In addition to Twitter, participants highlighted the role of Instagram and direct messaging in managing customer relationships. Participant 3 observed that *“a lot of customers prefer sending private messages about transaction issues rather than posting publicly.”* This indicates a differentiated use of platforms, where public channels are used for visibility and private channels for sensitive or personalised concerns. Notably, participant 2 linked this shift to reduced physical interactions: *“we noticed fewer people coming into branches because many issues were resolved online.”*

The bank’s official website was also mentioned as a complementary feedback channel, although it was perceived as less interactive. Participant 5 remarked that *“the website is more for information, but it still helps customers find answers without needing to visit the bank.”* This suggests that while the website supports communication, it lacks the immediacy and dialogic features associated with social media platforms.

From a public relations perspective, participants identified several strategic initiatives promoted through social media. Participant 10 highlighted the success of account deposit campaigns, stating that *“our promotions on social media significantly increased account openings across different regions.”* Similarly, participant 4 discussed the promotion of the “order tracking and money receipt” feature, noting that *“customers became more aware of these services because we consistently pushed them online.”* These initiatives reflect a deliberate effort to use social media not only for communication but also for behavioural influence.

Awareness creation emerged as a central theme in the bank’s rebranding efforts. Participant 9 explained that *“we invested heavily in informing customers about the new name and identity, because confusion was a major risk.”* At the same time, participant 3 emphasised the need for reassurance: *“we had to constantly remind customers that even though the name changed, the quality of service remained the same or better.”* These responses suggest that social media was used both to introduce change and to manage uncertainty associated with that change.

Overall, while participants generally agreed on the importance of social media in the repositioning process, their accounts reveal variations in emphasis, challenges in execution, and platform-specific dynamics. These nuances underscore the need to move beyond generalised claims and recognise the complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways in which digital platforms are integrated into organisational communication practices.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media tools are used for the organisation’s purposes. Some social media tools used by Polaris bank PR practitioners include Facebook, X (formerly twitter), Instagram, blogs, YouTube adverts and LinkedIn. This result can be further analysed to mean that public relations practitioners at Polaris bank apply these platforms to help keep the organisation visible, shape perception and communicate with stakeholders. Asides from knowing what social media tools Polaris bank employ in PR practice. There are reasons as to why organisations find these tools applicable to their communication needs. According to respondents, time effectiveness, ability to reach large/ segmented audience, quick response from audience and ability to shape opinion in real-time are some reasons why social media tools trump conventional communication channels. Even though the respondents mentioned that social media pushes communication from being one directional to more interactive, respondents still believe social media platforms have helped desk move from analogue to digital means of interacting with publics. Social media platforms help desk professionals become quicker in their response to communication, offer better services, provides responsive channels and improve on creating friendlier platforms. Social media keeps the organisation on its toes as it allows monitoring of comments made about the organisation. This goes to show how social media tools act as a feedback channel and reputational management tool. Social media practices are helping public relations professionals evolve by requiring them to equip themselves with digital skills/knowledge and become data-informed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The study recommends that public relations professionals should consider expanding their engagement on additional social media platforms. This would help in reaching diverse audiences and increasing the visibility of their banking institution. By broadening their social media presence, banks can more effectively engage with various customer segments.

2. It is advised that Polaris Bank, in its ongoing repositioning efforts, prioritize the development of a comprehensive social media strategy. This strategy should empower public relations personnel to fully recognize and leverage the transformative capabilities of social media, allowing the bank to maximize its outreach and foster stronger connections with stakeholders.
3. The research suggests that Polaris Bank should foster a strong commitment to repositioning among its employees, encouraging them to dedicate themselves to delivering exceptional service to customers. This effort is expected to cultivate deeper mutual understanding and strengthen the relationship between the bank's staff and its broader community.
4. Although the study focused on insights from Polaris Bank's public relations officers, it did not gather direct feedback from customers. Future research should include customer perspectives to validate the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the bank's repositioning efforts.

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