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## **Photojournalism and Public Relations Practice in the Era of Digital Complexities**

*Timothy Ekeledirichukwu Onyejelem, Eric Msughter Aondover  
& Patience Njideka Ezeonyejiaku*

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## CHAPTER 5

# Photojournalism and Public Relations Practice in the Era of Digital Complexities

*Timothy Ekeledirichukwu ONYEJELEM,  
Eric Msughter AONDOVER,  
Patience Njideka EZEONYEJIAKU*

The evolving digital landscape has greatly impacted all aspects of the society, including journalism and public relations. In Nigeria, where traditional media outlets are gradually embracing digital platforms, the role of photojournalists in shaping public relations practices cannot be understated. This chapter aims to examine the intersection between the digital photojournalist and the practice of public relations in the Nigerian media landscape. Specifically, it seeks to explore the ways in which digital photojournalists utilize various digital tools

and platforms to shape public perception, engage with audiences, and generate publicity for clients or organizations. By focusing on Nigeria, this chapter aims to provide insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that arise within the country's media landscape.

This chapter therefore discusses the impact of digital technology on photojournalism and its relationship with public relations in Nigeria. It aims to understand how digital advancements have influenced the role of photojournalists in the media industry and their interaction with public relations practitioners in Nigeria. According to Asemah and Ojukwu (2019), the emergence of digital technology has revolutionized the field of photojournalism, enabling photojournalists to capture and disseminate images more efficiently and effectively. The digital era has brought about changes in photojournalistic practices, including the use of social media platforms, online photo galleries, and multimedia storytelling techniques (Onyejelem & Duru, 2018).

In Nigeria, the media landscape has witnessed significant changes due to the proliferation of digital platforms and the increased use of social media by the public. As noted by Oso (2016), the rise of digital media has altered the traditional media ecosystem, challenging the roles and practices of journalists and public relations professionals in Nigeria. According to Onyejelem et al (2015), the convergence of photojournalism and public relations in the digital age has raised important questions about the ethical implications, credibility, and objectivity of visual storytelling in Nigeria's media landscape.

Onyejelem (2018) describes photojournalism as a form of journalism that utilizes photography to tell news stories, capture events, and document social issues. In the era of social media, the role and impact of photojournalism have undergone significant

changes. One of the key changes brought about by social media is the democratization of photojournalism. Traditional photojournalism was primarily controlled by mainstream media outlets, which had the power to decide which images were published and disseminated to the public. According to Ogah et al (2016), with the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (X), anyone with a smartphone and internet access can now become a photojournalist

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the emergence of social media platforms have significantly transformed the landscape of media and communication in Nigeria. Within this changing media landscape, the role of digital photojournalists as practitioners of public relations has gained prominence. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines the extent to which digital photojournalists contribute to the practice of public relations in Nigeria, and how their role impacts organizational communication strategies and public perception. This chapter addresses this research gap by conducting an appraisal of the relationship between digital photojournalists and public relations in the Nigerian media landscape. The chapter explores the challenges faced by digital photojournalists in their role as PR practitioners, their influence on public opinion and organizational communication, and the ethical considerations involved in their visual storytelling. It also explores the strategies employed by digital photojournalists to effectively collaborate with PR teams and enhance organizational communication efforts. Within this context, this chapter examines photojournalist and the practice of public relations in the era of digital media, and interrogates the practice of public relations in the era of digital media and PR practice in Nigeria.

### **The Context**

Photojournalism is a form of journalism that utilizes photography to tell news stories, capture events, and document

social issues. In the era of social media, the role and impact of photojournalism have undergone significant changes. One of the key changes brought about by social media is the democratization of photojournalism. Traditional photojournalism was primarily controlled by mainstream media outlets, which had the power to decide which images were published and disseminated to the public. However, with the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, anyone with a smartphone and internet access can now become a photojournalist and share their images with a wide audience (Ekwueme, 2018; Nwafor et al, 2024).

According to Onyejelem et al (2015) social media platforms have allowed for the rapid distribution of visual information, breaking down the barriers of traditional media gatekeeping. It has empowered citizens to become active participants in the news process, enabling them to capture and share images of events as they unfold. This has led to a proliferation of diverse perspectives and narratives in photojournalism, as individuals from different backgrounds and communities can now contribute their unique viewpoints (Onyejelem & Duru, 2018).

However, the advent of social media has also raised concerns regarding the authenticity and credibility of images shared online. As Adebayo (2017) notes, the ease of photo manipulation and the prevalence of fake news on social media platforms have made it crucial for photojournalists to verify the accuracy and context of the images they capture and share. The responsibility falls on both photojournalists and the audience to critically evaluate the images and sources before accepting them as factual representations of reality.

The fast-paced nature of social media has led to a shorter attention span and a culture of instant gratification. In the era of social media, images are often consumed quickly, scrolled past,

and forgotten (Gambo et al., 2021). This poses a challenge for photojournalists who aim to create impactful and thought-provoking visual narratives (Adebayo, 2017). They must find innovative ways to engage the audience amidst the vast amount of visual content available on social media platforms. The concept of photojournalism in the era of social media has brought both opportunities and challenges. Social media has democratized the field, allowing anyone to participate and share their visual stories.

Onyejelem, et al. (2023) note that despite the benefits of AI tools providing students with personalized learning opportunities, facilitating the development of practical skills that are essential in the journalism field, there is the potential for unintentional plagiarism when students rely heavily on AI-generated content without proper oversight. This however, has also raised concerns about authenticity and credibility. Photojournalists must adapt to the fast-paced nature of social media and find ways to create meaningful and engaging visual narratives. Onyejelem (2023) warns that this evolving landscape of photojournalism requires constant vigilance and critical evaluation from both photojournalists and the audience.

### **Photojournalist and the Practice of Public Relations in the Era of Digital Media**

In Nigeria's digital age, the role of photojournalism in public relations has shifted, presenting both challenges and opportunities. This transformation reflects broader changes worldwide, as digital platforms redefine how news is shared and consumed. Traditional photojournalism is now supplemented and sometimes challenged by citizen journalists with Smartphones (Owens-Ibie & Aondover, 2024; Vitalis et al, 2024). The availability of digital technology allows almost anyone to capture events, leading to a higher volume of images that compete with professional content. Nigerian photojournalists face pressures for immediacy and accuracy as news breaks on digital

platforms. Real-time reporting demands have also raised concerns about verification, as photojournalists must navigate speed versus accuracy.

Ahmed and Msughter (2022) observed that social media have allowed Nigerian PR teams to engage directly with the public, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Photojournalists working within PR settings now produce images meant to instantly appeal to and engage online audiences, blending the roles of journalism and strategic messaging. PR practitioners increasingly rely on striking visuals to draw attention and tell a brand's or individual's story effectively. High-quality, storytelling images have become valuable assets, with PR professionals in Nigeria depending on the visual impact to drive narratives.

In a digital space where images can be easily edited or misinterpreted, Nigerian photojournalists face ethical challenges around truth and representation. PR practitioners may manipulate images or context to suit a particular narrative, raising ethical issues around authenticity and manipulation in both journalism and public relations. The sharing culture of digital platforms has led to more image piracy and unauthorized usage, affecting photojournalists' intellectual property rights (Aondover et al, 2023; Governor et al, 2024). PR professionals in Nigeria must therefore ensure ethical sourcing and respect for photojournalists' ownership of their work.

Aondover et al, (2022) remark that the proliferation of free digital content has impacted traditional media revenues, affecting resources available to photojournalists. This has shifted many Nigerian photojournalists toward freelance or independent work, often collaborating with PR agencies or brands. Many photojournalists now use digital platforms to gain visibility, but monetizing digital content remains difficult due to competition and copyright issues, making it hard to sustain financially.

Digital platforms have made it possible for Nigerian photojournalists to reach a broader audience than ever before. Photojournalists and PR practitioners can both leverage social media to extend reach, impacting public opinion and discourse. Photojournalists often collaborate with PR agencies to enhance storytelling, blending journalistic authenticity with strategic messaging for impactful campaigns (Kurfi *et al*, 2021). The intersection of photojournalism and PR in Nigeria's digital era brings both new possibilities and ethical dilemmas. As digital platforms grow, the photojournalist's role in PR is increasingly crucial but also complex. Ethical practices, authenticity, and respect for journalistic standards remain essential in maintaining the credibility of visual storytelling in both fields (Mojaye & Aondoover, 2022).

### **Understanding Public Relations in the Era of Digital Media**

Public relations (PR) has transformed significantly with the rise of digital media, changing how organizations communicate, engage with audiences, and manage their reputation. Traditional PR relied heavily on print, radio, and TV to broadcast messages to a broad audience, but digital media offers new channels like social media, blogs, and websites. These platforms allow PR professionals to reach audiences more directly and interactively (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019).

Obasi and Msughter (2023) maintained that with digital media, PR is no longer a one-way broadcast. Audiences can respond instantly, making PR a two-way, real-time communication process that requires quick responsiveness and adaptability. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram let PR practitioners communicate directly with their audience, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This allows organizations to manage their narratives directly and quickly respond to public opinion. Influencer partnerships have become a key part of digital PR. Collaborating with influencers allows

brands to reach target demographics authentically and can build credibility by leveraging the influencer's following and reach.

According to Usman et al., (2022) digital PR is increasingly focused on creating engaging, visual content, such as infographics, videos, and live streams. Storytelling is crucial, as well-crafted stories help build connections, making audiences more likely to engage and share content. Encouraging users to create content related to the brand (e.g., via hashtag challenges) is a popular digital PR strategy. Oboko & Onyejelem (2024) aver that this user-generated content can enhance credibility, as people are more likely to trust content from peers than from brands. Digital media have made it essential for PR professionals to constantly monitor social platforms for public sentiment. They must be ready to manage feedback, especially negative, to protect brand reputation.

In the digital age, crises can escalate rapidly. Effective crisis management requires a pre-prepared digital response plan, including statements, Q&A documents, and guidelines for social media engagement, allowing for immediate, transparent, and cohesive messaging. Digital PR is data-rich, allowing PR teams to analyze audience engagement, track campaign performance, and refine their messaging based on insights gained from metrics such as views, shares, and audience demographics. Analytics help PR practitioners create highly targeted content, personalizing messages to specific demographics or user behavior. This targeted approach can enhance relevance and engagement (Yar'Adua et al, 2021; Nwokeocha & Onyejelem, 2024).

### **An Overview of PR Practice in Nigeria**

Public relations (PR) practice in Nigeria has evolved over the years to become a crucial aspect of communication management for organizations. It plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, managing relationships, and maintaining a positive

image for both private and public entities. One of the key characteristics of PR practice in Nigeria is its emphasis on relationship building. Nigerian PR practitioners recognize the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders, including the media, government agencies, communities, and consumers. Building trust and credibility is crucial in a country with diverse cultural and socio-political dynamics.

Another notable aspect of PR practice in Nigeria is the utilization of traditional and digital media channels. While traditional media such as television, radio, and print media still hold significant influence, the rise of digital media platforms has expanded the reach and impact of PR campaigns in Nigeria. PR practitioners leverage social media, online news portals, and influencers to disseminate messages and engage with target audiences. In Nigeria, PR practice also faces unique challenges. One of the prominent challenges is the prevalence of misinformation and fake news. PR practitioners have to navigate this landscape carefully and employ strategies to counter false narratives and protect the reputation of their clients or organizations.

Cultural diversity is another factor that shapes PR practice in Nigeria. With over 250 ethnic groups and multiple languages, PR practitioners need to consider cultural nuances and tailor their communication strategies accordingly. This includes understanding local customs, traditions, and values to effectively engage with diverse audiences. The role of government and regulatory bodies in PR practice cannot be overlooked. Nigerian PR practitioners work in an environment where government policies and regulations impact communication practices. Collaborating with relevant authorities and ensuring compliance with legal frameworks is essential for effective PR management

PR practice in Nigeria is characterized by a focus on relationship building, the utilization of traditional and digital media, challenges related to misinformation, cultural diversity, and the influence of government and regulatory bodies. These factors shape the strategies and approaches employed by PR practitioners in Nigeria to effectively manage communication and maintain a positive image for their clients or organizations. Distinguishing a professional photographer from a digital photojournalist involves recognizing the unique skill sets and roles that each of these individuals play in the field of photography. A professional photographer is someone who has undergone formal training in photography and possesses a deep understanding of the technical aspects of the craft. They have honed their skills through years of practice and experience in various genres of photography, such as portrait, landscape, or commercial photography (Mehta, 2019). Their expertise lies in capturing aesthetically pleasing images, often with a focus on composition, lighting, and visual storytelling.

On the other hand, a digital photojournalist is a professional who combines the skills of a photographer with journalistic principles to document news events and tell stories through images. They are trained to work in fast-paced and unpredictable environments, capturing moments as they unfold (Pereira, 2018). Digital photojournalists must possess not only technical photography skills but also a strong understanding of journalistic ethics, news values, and the ability to capture images that convey the essence of a news story. While both professional photographers and digital photojournalists use cameras and similar technical equipment, their purposes and objectives differ. Professional photographers often work in controlled environments, such as studios or planned photo shoots, where they have the luxury of time and creative freedom to capture compelling images (Mehta, 2019). Their focus is often on creating visually appealing photographs that evoke emotions and engage

the viewer.

In contrast, digital photojournalists work in dynamic and often challenging conditions, where they must react quickly to capture fleeting moments that communicate news events and stories (Pereira, 2018; Nwafor et al, 2024). Their images serve as a visual representation of factual information and are expected to adhere to journalistic principles of accuracy, fairness, and objectivity. Digital photojournalists must navigate ethical considerations, such as ensuring the privacy and dignity of subjects, while still capturing impactful images that inform and engage the audience. The advent of digital technology and social media platforms has blurred the lines between professional photographers and digital photojournalists to some extent. Many professional photographers now venture into photojournalism by covering news events or documenting social issues (Mehta, 2019). Similarly, digital photojournalists may employ artistic techniques to enhance the visual impact of their images.

However, the distinction between the two roles remains significant. Professional photographers primarily focus on creating visually appealing images for artistic or commercial purposes, while digital photojournalists prioritize capturing and conveying news stories through their photographs (Pereira, 2018). The latter must adhere to the principles of journalistic integrity and have a deep understanding of the ethical considerations involved in reporting through images. Distinguishing a professional photographer from a digital photojournalist requires recognizing the differences in their skill sets, objectives, and the contexts in which they work. Professional photographers excel in artistic and commercial photography, while digital photojournalists combine photography skills with journalistic principles to document news events and tell stories. While there may be overlaps between the two roles, their core purposes and approaches remain distinct.

The role of a digital photojournalist as a public relations practitioner in the Nigerian media ecosystem is an increasingly important one. With the rise of digital media and the proliferation of social media platforms, the need for visually compelling content has become crucial in shaping public opinion and promoting organizational messaging. In this context, photojournalists who possess the skills to capture impactful images and tell stories visually have become valuable assets for public relations teams. One key aspect of the digital photojournalist's role in public relations is their ability to document and showcase the activities and achievements of organizations. By capturing high-quality images that effectively convey the organization's message, photojournalists can help PR practitioners create engaging content for press releases, social media posts, and websites. These visuals not only enhance the storytelling process but also grab the attention of the audience, increasing the chances of the message being seen and understood.

The digital photojournalist can play a crucial role in crisis communication. During times of crisis, visual storytelling becomes even more critical in shaping public perception and managing the organization's reputation. By capturing and disseminating images that accurately depict the situation, photojournalists can help PR practitioners provide transparent and authentic information to the public. This can help build trust and credibility, as well as demonstrate the organization's commitment to addressing the crisis effectively. The digital photojournalist's expertise in visual storytelling can also be utilized in proactive public relations initiatives. By capturing compelling images that showcase the organization's positive impact, photojournalists can help PR practitioners create narratives that resonate with the target audience. These visuals can be used in media pitches, feature articles, and other PR materials to generate positive publicity and enhance the

organization's brand image.

It is important to note that the work of digital photojournalists as public relations practitioners should adhere to ethical standards and principles. They should prioritize accuracy, balance, and fairness in their visual storytelling, ensuring that the images they capture truthfully represent the organization and its activities. They should also respect privacy and obtain necessary permissions when photographing individuals or sensitive locations. The role of a digital photojournalist as a public relations practitioner in the Nigerian media ecosystem is multifaceted and valuable. Their ability to capture impactful images and tell stories visually can significantly contribute to shaping public opinion, promoting organizational messaging, managing crises, and enhancing the organization's brand image. By working collaboratively with PR teams, digital photojournalists can leverage their skills to create compelling visual content that engages the target audience and achieves strategic communication goals. Qualities of a professional digital photojournalist and a PR practitioner that make them collaborative partners.

- **Strong Communication Skills:** Both professional digital photojournalists and PR practitioners need to possess excellent communication skills. They should be able to effectively convey their messages, ideas, and objectives to each other and to their target audience.
- **Creativity and Visual Storytelling:** Digital photojournalists excel in capturing compelling visual stories through their photographs. Their creativity in framing shots and capturing emotions can greatly enhance the storytelling aspect of PR campaigns.
- **Understanding of News Values:** Digital photojournalists and PR practitioners should have a solid understanding of news values and what makes a story newsworthy. This

shared knowledge helps them collaborate in creating content that is relevant, timely, and engaging for the audience.

- **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Both professionals need to be adaptable and flexible in their approach. They should be able to respond quickly to changing situations, news events, and emerging trends. This allows them to collaborate effectively and adjust their strategies accordingly.
- **Ethical Conduct** Professional digital photojournalists and PR practitioners should adhere to ethical standards in their work. They should prioritize accuracy, truthfulness, and respect for privacy while collaborating on projects.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Collaboration requires strong interpersonal skills, including teamwork, active listening, and empathy. Both the digital photojournalist and PR practitioner should be able to understand and appreciate each other's perspectives and work together harmoniously.

Agenda Setting Theory posits that the media has the power to influence the public's perception of issues by determining which topics are given prominence and how they are framed (Asemah, et al 2017). In the context of this discussion, the theory can be applied to understanding how digital photojournalists, through their visual storytelling, shape the public's agenda and influence public opinion in Nigeria. It can also shed light on how digital photojournalists collaborate with public relations practitioners to shape organizational messaging and communication strategies. In the context of Nigeria, where media play crucial role in shaping public perception and influencing decision-making, understanding how digital photojournalists and public relations practitioners interact can provide valuable insights into the media landscape.

According to Asemah et al (2017), agenda setting theory posits that the media have the power to influence which issues are considered important by the public through the selection and framing of news stories. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Nigerian media landscape, where digital photojournalists and public relations practitioners play a significant role in shaping the narratives that are presented to the public. Onyejekem, (2018) suggests that the relationship between digital photojournalists and public relations practitioners can impact the agenda-setting process, as public relations professionals often work to shape media coverage to favor their clients or organizations. This dynamic interaction between media professionals and PR practitioners can influence the information that is disseminated to the public and ultimately shape public opinion on various issues.

The Agenda Setting Theory serves as a framework for examining how much digital photojournalists contribute to Nigerian public relations practices, how their visual content shapes public opinion, and how photojournalists and PR professionals collaborate to shape organizational communication, since digital photojournalists play a significant role in Nigerian media, particularly with regard to public relations strategies.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter examined photojournalist and the practice of public relations in the era of digital media. It argued that digital media has reshaped PR into a more interactive, immediate, and data-driven field. PR professionals must now be adept at digital content creation, audience engagement, and crisis management, while maintaining the ability to craft compelling narratives that resonate in a fast-paced, interconnected world. This new era demands agility, transparency, and a strategic use of digital tools to build, protect, and enhance reputations. Photojournalists and public relations (PR) professionals share common goals of

storytelling and influence but often approach these with different priorities. With the rise of digital media, the relationship between these fields has grown closer, as visual storytelling becomes more crucial in shaping public opinion and brand perception. The relationship between photojournalism and public relations is one of collaboration and tension. While both share an interest in storytelling, they must balance objectivity with messaging. Digital media have intensified this connection, creating a space where photojournalists work closely with PR to shape public perception while striving to maintain the authenticity that underpins trust.

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