



Strategic Communications in the Digital Era: Global Trends and Insights from West Africa

Chike Walter Duru, Ph.D ¹ & Raphael Olugbenga Abimbola, Ph.D ²

¹ Department of Mass Communication Faculty of Social and Management Sciences Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria

² Department of Mass Communication Faculty of The Social Sciences Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author: **Chike Walter Duru, Ph.D**

Abstract

A growing trend in the practice of Strategic Communications and Public Relations globally is the expansion of roles and the blend of strategic leadership with multimedia content production responsibilities. The multimedia production tasks include video production and editing, photography, and other forms of content production. These new roles are in addition to the traditional functions of messaging, stakeholder engagement, media relations, etc. The study investigates this global trend, with a focus on West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana). Anchored on the Excellence Theory and Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study employed mixed methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A total of 112 communications professionals completed survey questionnaire, while 15 senior managers participated in semi-structured interview. The study found out that multimedia production expectations are prevalent, with 72% of respondents reporting these tasks as part of their role. While these developments have obvious benefits and align with digital-first imperatives, they risk strategic dilution, workload overload, and professional identity tension. The study recommends clear role definitions and balanced integration of production and strategic responsibilities to sustain effective communications practice globally.

Article DNA

Article Type:
Original Research Paper

DOI:
[10.5281/zenodo.18508341](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18508341)

Article History:
Received: 22-01-2026
Accepted: 28-01-2026
Published: 06-02-2026

Keywords:
Strategic Communication,
Public Relations, Digital Era,
Global Trends, West Africa

How to Cite

Chike Walter Duru & Raphael Olugbenga Abimbola. (2026). Strategic Communications in the Digital Era: Global Trends and Insights from West Africa. *UAR Journal of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (UARJAHSS)*, 2(2), 1–11.
[10.5281/zenodo.18508341](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18508341)

License Information

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.

Introduction

Strategic Communication refers to a deliberate effort towards saying the right things, at the right time, to the right audience, using the right channels, to achieve set communication objectives. This reinforces the fact that every professional communication effort is deliberate, purpose-driven and audience-centered. As Hallahan et al. (2007) put it, strategic communication is the deliberate and systematic use of communication by organizations to achieve specific objectives through the effective alignment of messages, audiences, timing, and channels.

Globally, the landscape of the communications profession continues to evolve. Profound transformations are taking place steadily. Advancements in technology, social media proliferation, and digital-first strategies are reshaping how organisations manage public perception, engage with stakeholders, and deliver messages in a timely manner.

Traditional public relations (PR) roles, once predominantly focused on media relations and press releases, are increasingly integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics into everyday professional practice. This integration is reshaping how organizations manage reputation, monitor conversations, evaluate impact, and engage audiences across multiple channels (Cision & PRWeek, 2025; Muck Rack, 2025).

In most developed nations of the world, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and parts of Asia, communication and public relations professionals increasingly manage both strategic oversight and content production, including video, photography, graphics, and social media campaigns (Cornelissen, 2020; Gregory, 2021).

In West Africa, the trend is very pronounced. Nigeria, Africa's largest media market, and Ghana, a rapidly digitized society display increasing demand for communications professionals capable of both strategic leadership and hands-on content creation. Available literature indicates that social and digital media have significantly influenced PR practice in the region, with practitioners in Ghana reporting a majority of their professional activities now occurring on platforms such as Facebook and other digital networks (Anani-Bossman, 2023).

While this integration has enormous benefits, including cost effectiveness and swiftness, it raises serious concerns about clarity of roles, sustainability of workload, as well as professional identity. In Africa, empirical evidence is limited, necessitating studies to contextualize global trends within local realities.

Statement of the problem

The speedy digitization of strategic communication practice has essentially altered professional roles, tools, and expectations globally, with growing dependence on social media, and evolving technologies such as artificial intelligence. While these shifts are well documented in developed regions, empirical evidence on how global digital communication trends are reshaping professional practice in West Africa remains limited. In countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, communication professionals are increasingly expected to combine strategic leadership with hands-on digital content production, raising concerns about role clarity, workload sustainability, and professional identity. The absence of context-specific study creates a gap in appreciating how these global changes are experienced, managed, and institutionalized within West African communication settings. Addressing this gap is crucial for grounding strategic communication theory and practice in local realities and for informing professional standards, training, and policy development in the region.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how the digital transformation of communication practice is reshaping strategic communication in West Africa.
2. To identify key global digital trends influencing strategic communication practice in the contemporary media environment.
3. To examine how strategic communication professionals in West Africa integrate digital platforms, social media, and emerging technologies into their professional practice.
4. To assess the implications of expanded digital responsibilities on role clarity, workload sustainability, and professional identity.
5. To explore similarities and differences between global strategic communication practices and those emerging in selected West African contexts.

Literature Review

Conceptual Overview of Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is widely recognized as the deliberate and systematic use of communication to achieve organizational objectives through careful planning, audience targeting, and alignment of messages with broader organizational goals. Unlike routine messaging, it foregrounds purpose, intentionality, and measurable outcomes in both public and private sector contexts. Contemporary scholarship positions strategic communication as an

integrative discipline, combining theory, research, and practice to influence stakeholder perceptions and behaviors (Cornelissen, 2020; Gregory, 2021; Hallahan et al., 2007).

Recent studies highlight that strategic communication is not merely tactical message delivery; it operationalizes organizational intent through coordinated messaging, audience analysis, and stakeholder engagement. As such, communication is increasingly recognized as a core strategic function, embedded in organizational strategy and decision-making, and essential to reputation management and performance outcomes (Men & Tsai, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2021).

Digital Transformation and Technological Integration

The digital era has profoundly reshaped the practice of strategic communication. Advances in digital technologies, social media, and artificial intelligence (AI) have expanded the tools available to practitioners and raised expectations for real-time, interactive, and data-driven communication strategies. Digital platforms now allow organizations to engage audiences dynamically, personalize messaging, and monitor performance through analytics (Men & Tsai, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2021; Ismaili et al., 2025).

AI and automation tools, such as predictive analytics and natural language processing, are enabling organizations to anticipate audience behavior, optimize content strategies, and respond rapidly to emerging trends. Consequently, strategic communication roles are becoming hybridized, blending traditional management and planning skills with digital literacy, content creation, and data analytics competencies (Osei-Mensah, Asiamah & Sackey, 2023; Strauss, Harr & Pieper, 2025).

Global Trends in Strategic Communication

Globally, strategic communication is moving from traditional public relations models toward integrated, multi-channel, and data-driven approaches. In developed regions such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Asia, practitioners increasingly manage both strategic oversight and content production, including video, graphics, and social media campaigns (Cornelissen, 2020; Gregory, 2021).

Digital-first strategies allow organizations to implement real-time feedback loops, improve audience segmentation, and measure communication effectiveness quantitatively. Moreover, AI-enhanced tools enable predictive and adaptive strategies, highlighting a shift from reactive to proactive communication management. This transformation reflects a broader understanding of

strategic communication as a vital organizational capability that drives engagement, reputation, and performance outcomes (Ismaili et al., 2025; Zerfass et al., 2021).

No doubt, digital transformation has changed professional communications practice worldwide. Senior PR roles now often require direct involvement in multimedia production, alongside traditional strategic tasks (Breakenridge, 2019; Smith & Zook, 2022). The convergence of strategy and production reflects organizational priorities: faster content creation, real-time engagement, and reduced reliance on external vendors.

However, scholars warn that blending strategy and production may dilute professional focus. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and reputation management - the core value of senior communications roles, can be compromised if managers are overburdened with operational tasks (Lee & Chen, 2021).

Insights from West Africa

In West Africa, digital adoption has accelerated. Nigeria hosts over 30 million social media users, while Ghana exhibits rapid internet growth and digital media engagement (Nyarko, 2023). Studies indicate that PR practitioners spend substantial portions of their working hours on social media and multimedia content creation, often at the expense of strategic functions (Adebayo, 2022).

Practitioners often experience role ambiguity, high workloads, and limited access to advanced technology and training. Local institutional and cultural dynamics influence how global digital practices are integrated into organizational strategies (Bamgbose & Okoro, 2023; Pub. Revs, 2023).

Despite this trend, research on the implications for professional identity, workload, and role clarity is scarce. This study situates West Africa within the global discourse on strategic communications evolution, highlighting the tension between operational demands and strategic imperatives.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on two theories: Excellence Theory and Diffusion of Innovation Theory.

Excellence Theory

Excellence Theory emphasizes that strategic communication is a management function critical to organizational effectiveness. It argues that communication is most effective when it is aligned with organizational goals, prioritizes stakeholder relationships, and employs two-way, symmetrical communication (Grunig, 2013; Hallahan et al., 2007). In the digital era, this theory underscores the importance of leveraging social media, analytics, and interactive platforms to engage audiences, manage reputation, and enhance organizational performance. It highlights the need for communication professionals to combine strategic oversight with practical digital competencies.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory (2003) explains how new technologies and practices are adopted and integrated within organizations and societies. This theory is particularly relevant for the West African context, where the uptake of digital platforms and AI-driven communication tools is transforming professional practice. It helps to understand factors that influence adoption, such as perceived usefulness, compatibility with existing practices, and social influence, providing a framework to examine how global digital trends are adapted in local settings (Osei-Mensah, Asiamah & Sackey, 2023).

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, enabled analysis of trends and in-depth insights into professional experiences.

Study Population

The study population comprised communications professionals who are registered members of the Public Relations Associations of their countries (Nigeria and Ghana). These include middle level communications officials, consultants and senior managers.

Sampling Techniques and Procedures

The study employed a purposive sampling approach to ensure that only participants with direct professional experience in strategic communication and public relations were included. Communication practitioners working in managerial or senior-level roles in Nigeria and Ghana were deliberately selected because their positions require engagement with both strategic

decision-making and digital communication activities. For the interview component, participants were selected using experience-based criteria, with only professionals who had at least five years of relevant work experience included in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through two primary methods. First, a structured online survey was administered to 112 communication professionals in Nigeria and Ghana. The survey instrument consisted mainly of Likert-scale questions designed to capture information on digital responsibilities, multimedia production involvement, and perceived effects on strategic roles. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 senior communication professionals to obtain in-depth insights into role expectations, workload, professional identity, and adaptation to digital transformation.

Sampling and Data Collection

Survey: copies of online questionnaires were distributed to 112 communications professionals in Nigeria (n = 62) and Ghana (n = 50), targeting those with current or recent PR/Strategic Communications Manager roles.

Interviews: semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 senior managers (Nigeria: 10; Ghana: 5) with 5+ years of experience.

Survey items included Likert-scale questions on time allocation, role responsibilities, and perceived impact of multimedia production. Interview questions explored workload, professional identity, adaptation strategies, and career development

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively (percentages, means). Interview transcripts were coded thematically, identifying recurring patterns concerning strategic dilution, workload, adaptation, and organizational practices.

Results

Survey Findings

Indicator	Nigeria (n = 62)	Ghana (n = 50)	Overall (n = 112)
Job includes multimedia production	75%	68%	72%

≥30% of time spent on content production	58%	52%	55%
Production reduces strategic focus	61%	57%	59%
Role expectations are overloaded	48%	42%	45%
Prefer specialized production team	70%	65%	68%

Interpretation

Most communications professionals in West Africa now report multimedia production as a core duty. Over half of the respondents spend significant time on operational tasks, with almost 60% acknowledging that these duties reduce strategic focus.

Qualitative Insights

Key themes emerged from interviews:

1. **Strategic Dilution:** Multimedia tasks limit time for planning and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Workload and Burnout:** Managers report longer hours and stress.
3. **Professional Identity:** Performance evaluation often emphasizes content output over strategic impact.
4. **Adaptation and Skill Development:** Some professionals embrace multimedia skills to remain competitive.
5. **Organizational Constraints:** Budget and resource considerations drive consolidation of roles.

Discussion

The study set out to examine how digital transformation is reshaping strategic communication practice in West Africa, with focus on Nigeria and Ghana. The findings show that digitalization has significantly expanded professional roles, particularly through the inclusion of multimedia content production as a routine responsibility. Survey results indicate that a large majority of respondents now perform production-related tasks, confirming that strategic communication practice in the region has become increasingly hybrid.

In line with the second objective, the data reveal strong convergence between global and West African practices. Respondents reported expectations similar to those documented internationally, where strategic communication professionals are required to manage both

planning and execution. However, the findings suggest that this convergence is occurring within more constrained organizational environments, which intensifies role pressure and limits specialization.

Regarding the integration of digital platforms and technologies, the results demonstrate heavy reliance on social and online media for communication activities. Interview responses indicate that while these platforms enhance reach and speed, they also demand continuous engagement, thereby reshaping work patterns and increasing task density. This supports the view that digital tools have become central, not supplementary, to contemporary communication practice.

The study further reveals clear implications for role clarity, workload, and professional identity. More than half of the respondents indicated that production demands reduce strategic focus, while many expressed preference for dedicated production support. Qualitative evidence points to growing concern that professional value is increasingly measured by content output rather than strategic contribution, raising questions about long-term professional sustainability.

Finally, comparison of findings across contexts suggests that while West African strategic communication practice reflects global digital trends, local conditions such as limited staffing and budgetary constraints deepen the challenges associated with role expansion. These findings highlight the need for context-sensitive approaches to integrating digital responsibilities without undermining strategic effectiveness.

Conclusion

The global shift toward multimedia-savvy communications managers is evident in West Africa. While this trend enhances agility and engagement, it risks overburdening managers and undermining strategic focus.

Recommendations

1. Distinguish strategic leadership from content production responsibilities.
2. Hire or outsource multimedia production to allow managers to focus on strategy.
3. Encourage digital literacy without compromising strategic competencies.
4. Professional associations must provide guidelines for role expectations and career pathways.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **UAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UARJAHSS)**, ISSN 3049-4362 (Online). In Volume 2 (2026), Issue 2 (February)

The journal is published and managed by **UAR Publisher**.

References

Adebayo, T. (2022). *Digital media and public relations in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities*. PR Academy Press.

Anani-Bossman, A. (2023). Social media adoption and public relations practice in Ghana. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 15(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1674/jams.2023>

Bamgbose, A., & Okoro, N. (2023). Digital disruption and professional practice in African public relations. *African Journal of Communication*, 10(2), 89–105.

Breakenridge, D. (2019). *Social media and public relations: Eight new practices for the PR professional*. Pearson Education.

Cision & PRWeek. (2025). *Global state of the public relations profession report*. Cision Ltd.

Cornelissen, J. (2020). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory and practice* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Gregory, A. (2021). *Strategic communication in the digital age*. Kogan Page.

Grunig, J. E. (2013). Excellence in public relations and communication management. In K. Sriramesh, A. Zerfass, & J.-N. Kim (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: Current trends and emerging topics* (pp. 197–214). Routledge.

Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180701285244>

Ismaili, F., Petrova, M., & Andonova, V. (2025). Artificial intelligence and data-driven strategic communication: Emerging global practices. *Journal of Communication Management*, 29(1), 1–18.

Lee, H., & Chen, Y. (2021). Strategic communications and digital content production: A global perspective. *Journal of Communication Management*, 25(3), 210–229. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-2020-0094>

Men, L. R., & Tsai, W.-H. S. (2020). Beyond liking or following: Understanding public engagement on social networking sites in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 46(4), 101880. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101880>

Muck Rack. (2025). *The state of journalism and PR: Global report*. Muck Rack Inc.

Nyarko, R. (2023). The influence of social media on PR practice in Ghana. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 15(2), 112–129.

Osei-Mensah, J., Asiamah, N., & Sackey, R. A. (2023). Diffusion of digital communication technologies in African public relations practice. *Journal of African Communication Research*, 16(1), 23–41.

Public Relations Reviews Africa (Pub. Revs.). (2023). *Public relations practice and digital transformation in Africa*.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.

Smith, R., & Zook, Z. (2022). *Marketing communications: Integrating offline and online with social media* (7th ed.). Routledge.

Strauss, J., Harr, M., & Pieper, R. (2025). Digital convergence and role hybridization in strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 19(1), 34–52.

Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., Nothhaft, H., & Werder, K. P. (2021). Strategic communication: Defining the field and its contribution to research and practice. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 15(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2020.1870021>