Language Trends and Virality in Social Media Public Relations Handles of Tertiary Institutions in Bayelsa State

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Abstract

In the ever-evolving landscape of communication, the symbiotic relationship between language trends and virality in social media has become a dynamic force shaping public relations strategies. Nowhere is this interplay more pronounced than in the context of tertiary institutions, where Public Relations Officers (PROs) navigate the intricacies of language use to disseminate information, engage audiences, and maintain a compelling online presence. The study examined language trends and virality in social media public relations handles of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consist of all 109 staff in the public relations offices in the seven tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A census survey which involves the use of all the respondents in the population. The instrument for data collection was a "Language Trends and Virality in Social Media Public Relations Handles Questionnaire (LTVSMPRHQ)" developed by the researcher. It consists of three (3) sections, namely; Section A, B and C. Section A measured the demographic variables of the respondents, Section B consist of 7-items on the linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content in social media. Section C consist of 7-items on the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment. The content and face validity of the instrument was done by communication experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Formula and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, which was considered appropriate for the study. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that the extent to which linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media is high. Also, the study revealed that the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment was high. It was recommended that Public Relations officers should consider language-related factors when using social media handle for information dissemination.

Keywords: *Language Trends, Virality, Social Media, Public Relations Handles, Tertiary Institutions*

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of communication, the symbiotic relationship between language trends and virality in social media has become a dynamic force shaping public relations strategies. Nowhere is this interplay more pronounced than in the context of tertiary institutions, where Public Relations Officers (PROs) navigate the intricacies of language use to disseminate information, engage audiences, and maintain a compelling online presence (Hatch, 2016). This study delves into the fascinating realm of Language Trends and Virality in Social Media among Public Relations Officers of Tertiary Institutions in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Bayelsa State, with its diverse tertiary institutions, stands as a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities faced by PR professionals in the digital age. As social media platforms increasingly become the primary channels for information dissemination and community engagement, understanding the linguistic strategies employed by PR officers becomes imperative (Teibowei, 2023). This investigation seeks to unravel the nuanced linguistic trends shaping communication within these institutions and assess how these trends contribute to the virality of PR content on social media platforms.

Social Media remains a powerful tool, transcends mere conveyance of information; it shapes perceptions, establishes connections, and triggers engagement. In the unique context of tertiary institutions, where diverse audiences ranging from students and faculty to alumni and prospective students coexist, the effectiveness of language becomes even more pivotal (Hung, 2018).

This research endeavors to explore the specific linguistic trends adopted by PR officers in Bayelsa State's tertiary institutions, examining the utilization of hashtags, memes, storytelling techniques, and other language-related elements. Moreover, the study aims to dissect the anatomy of virality within this domain, unraveling the factors that propel PR messages into the digital spotlight.

As we embark on this exploration, the significance of the findings extends beyond the academic realm, reaching into the practical domain of public relations. By unraveling the language trends that resonate with audiences and understanding the mechanisms that propel content to viral status, this research aims to equip PR professionals with valuable insights for crafting communication strategies that captivate, inform, and leave a lasting impact on the diverse stakeholders within tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The convergence of language and virality in social media among PR officers unfolds as a captivating chapter in the ongoing narrative of effective communication in the digital era.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined language trends and virality in social media public relations handles of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

i. To explore linguistic trends contributing to the virality of public relations content on social media.
ii. To investigate the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide:

i. To what extent does linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media?

ii.   What is the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment?

Conceptual Clarification

Language Trends

Language trends refer to the prevailing patterns, styles, and linguistic choices that gain popularity and widespread adoption within a particular context or community. These trends are dynamic and can encompass various elements of language use, including vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and stylistic features. Teibowei (2023) averred that language trends often emerge as a response to cultural shifts, technological advancements, or evolving social dynamics, reflecting the ever-changing nature of human communication.

In the context of social media and public relations, language trends extend to the ways in which individuals and organizations express themselves online. This may involve the use of specific phrases, hashtags, memes, or linguistic styles that resonate with a particular audience or align with the tone of the current digital discourse.

Virality in social Media

Virality in social media refers to the rapid and widespread dissemination of content across online platforms. Viral content has the ability to capture the attention of a large audience, leading to extensive sharing, engagement, and discussion. The concept of virality is closely tied to the exponential amplification of content through social sharing, often resulting in the content reaching audiences far beyond its initial target.

Viral content can take various forms, including videos, images, memes, or written posts. The factors contributing to virality are multifaceted and may include relatability, emotional resonance, humor, uniqueness, and timeliness. Bruning (2020) disclosed that understanding the dynamics of virality is crucial for individuals and organizations seeking to maximize the impact of their messages in the crowded and competitive landscape of social media.

Public Relations

This is a strategic communication discipline that focuses on building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations, individuals, or institutions and their various publics or stakeholders. The goal of PR is to create a favorable public image, enhance reputation, and effectively communicate key messages to target audiences. Grunig (2012) submitted that PR professionals use a range of communication tools and tactics to shape public perception and promote mutual understanding.

In the digital age, PR extends beyond traditional media to encompass online platforms, social media, and other digital channels. PR activities include media relations, crisis communication, event planning, community engagement, and content creation. Effective PR involves understanding the needs and expectations of diverse audiences and employing communication strategies that align with organizational goals.

Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions refer to higher education institutions that provide post-secondary education and training beyond the secondary school level. These institutions include universities, colleges, and other educational entities that offer undergraduate and, in many cases, postgraduate programs. Teibowei (2022) submitted that tertiary institutions are hubs of learning, research, and academic discourse, serving diverse communities of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the broader public.

In the context of this conceptual clarification, tertiary institutions are the focal point for examining language trends and virality in social media within the realm of public relations.

The communication strategies employed by PR officers in tertiary institutions play a crucial role in shaping the institution's image, engaging stakeholders, and navigating the complex landscape of digital communication. Understanding the dynamics within tertiary institutions provides insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by PR professionals in the higher education sector.

Methods and Materials

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. Charles-Owaba (2019), referred to descriptive survey design as a design in which a group of people or item is studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few individuals or items considered to be representatives of the entire group The population of the study consist of all 109 staff in the public relations offices in the seven tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A census survey which involves the use of all the respondents in the population. The instrument for data collection was a "Language Trends and Virality in Social Media Public Relations Handles Questionnaire (LTVSMPRHQ)" developed by the researcher. It consists of three (3) sections, namely; Section A, B and C. Section A measured the demographic variables of the respondents, Section B consist of 7-items on the linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content in social media. Section C consist of 7-items on the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment. The content and face validity of the instrument was done by communication experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Formula and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, which was considered appropriate for the study. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. Online mode of questionnaire distribution was adopted through the approved WhatsApp platform of various medical class. In all, 100% return rate was achieved.

Analysis and Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent to which linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
1.	Linguistic diversity in our PR content enhances its appeal on social media	2.23	0.62	L.E
2.	Incorporating trending hashtags contributes to the virality of our PR messages	2.36	1.15	L.E
3.	The use of storytelling techniques in our content enhances its shareability on social media	2.32	1.18	L.E
4.	Interactive content, such as polls or quizzes, increases the virality of our PR posts	2.71	1.10	HE
5.	Employing humour in our PR content positively influences its shareability	2.67	1.16	HE
6.	Language is tailored to match the preferences of our target audience on social media	2.83	1.12	HE
7.	The use of emojis and visual elements enhances the impact of our PR content	2.63	1.04	**HE**
8.	Grand Mean		2.52	1.04

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on the extent to which linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media. The grand mean of 2.52 is greater than the cut-off mean value of 2.50, indicating high extent. Hence, the extent to which linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media is high.

Research Question 2

What is the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
8.	The choice of language significantly influences the reach of our PR messages online	1.71	0.84	L.E
9.	Using clear and concise language enhances the resonance of our PR messages.	2.41	1.15	L.E
10.	Inclusive language contributes to a broader audience reach for our PR content online	2.36	1.15	L.E
11.	Utilizing storytelling techniques in our PR messages improves audience engagement online	3.19	0.74	HE
12	The incorporation of multimedia elements (images, videos) positively impacts the resonance of our PR messages	3.31	0.50	H.E
13	Using trending hashtags enhances the visibility and reach of our PR messages on social media	3.32	0.58	HE
14	The number of likes, shares, and comments is a reliable indicator of the success of our PR messages online	2.62	0.73	**HE**
	Grand mean	2.72	0.83	

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 2 above shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment. The grand mean of 2.72 is greater than the cut-off mean value of 2.50, indicating high impact. Hence, the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment was high.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the extent to which linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media is high. Also, the study revealed that the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment was high. These findings align with Sun (2018), Ledingham (2021), and Hofstede (2021) disclosed that the impact of cultural diversity in language within PR practices is multifaceted and influential.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined language trends and virality in social media public relations handles of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The study has established that the extent to which

linguistic trends contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media is high. Also, the study revealed that the impact of language-related factors on the reach and resonance of public relation messages in the online environment was high. Based on this it was recommended that:

i.   Public Relations officers should contribute to the virality of public relations content on social media by demystifying linguistic trends.
ii.   Public Relations officers should consider language-related factors when using social media handle for information dissemination.

Conclusion:

The study on language trends and virality in social media public relations handles of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State reveals valuable insights into the communication strategies employed by these institutions. The analysis of language trends and the factors contributing to content virality on social media platforms underscores the importance of effective communication in the digital age.

Key Findings:

Identification of language trends: The study identifies the prevalent language trends used on social media platforms by tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. This insight sheds light on the linguistic preferences of the target audience and provides a basis for crafting more engaging and relatable content.

Virality factors: The research delves into the factors contributing to the virality of content on social media. Understanding these factors, such as content type, timing, and platform-specific strategies, can help institutions enhance the reach and impact of their communication efforts.

Implications for public relations: The study's findings have implications for the field of public relations in tertiary institutions. It emphasizes the need for a dynamic and adaptive approach to communication, aligning with the target audience's evolving language preferences and online behaviours.

Policy Recommendations:

Social Media Training: Tertiary institutions should provide regular training sessions for their public relations teams to stay updated on the latest language trends and social media strategies. This ensures that communication efforts remain relevant and practical.

Content Strategy Development: Institutions should invest in developing a comprehensive content strategy that considers the identified language trends and virality factors. This strategy should be flexible and adaptable to the dynamic nature of social media platforms.

Audience Engagement Initiatives: Institutions should actively engage with their audience on social media by responding to comments, conducting polls, and creating interactive content. Building a robust online community fosters a positive image and increases the likelihood of viral content.

Data Analytics Integration: Use data analytics tools to track the performance of social media content. Regularly analyzing key metrics will provide valuable insights, allowing institutions to refine their strategies based on real-time feedback.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Collaborate with influencers, alumni, and other stakeholders to amplify the reach of communication efforts. Building partnerships can contribute to content virality and enhance the institution's online presence.

In summary, the conclusion and policy recommendations underscore the importance of staying attuned to language trends, understanding virality factors, and implementing strategic communication policies to enhance the effectiveness of social media public relations handles in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State.

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