



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL AT
ETHIOPIAN MINISTRY OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

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**THE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL AT
THE ETHIOPIAN MINISTRY OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

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RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “The use of Social Media as a Public Relations Tool at Ministry of Innovation and Technology” is my original work and has not been presented for any degree in this university or any other university or colleges, as well as all sources of material, used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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June, 2019

ADVISOR’S THESIS SUBMISSION APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Use of Social Media as a Public Relations Tool at the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia**” submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master’s with specialization in **Public Relations**, the Graduate Program of the Department of **Journalism and Strategic Communication** has been carried out by **Wubareg Yitayew**, under my supervision.

Therefore I recommend that the student has fulfilled the requirements and hence hereby can submit the thesis to the department for defense.

Name of Principal advisor ----- Signature ----- Date -----

June, 2019

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Wubareg Yitayew

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYM

ENA	Ethiopia News Agency
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDI	Information Development Index
MCIT	Ministry of communication and Information Technology
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOIT	Ministry of Innovation and Technology
OPR	Organization Public Relationships
PR	Public Relations
SNS	Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

The technological advancement of the 21st century has revolutionized the communication environment in such a way that government communication has been migrated from offline into online. The use of social media in government communication has resulted in the use of blogs, twitter, Instagram and Facebook as a Public relations (PR) tool for organizations. Therefore, The purpose of this study is to explore and evaluate the use of social media as a Public Relations tool in Ministry of Innovation and Technology. As it is seen in literature in developing countries social media practices do not have a good record, Ethiopia as developing country shares same problems in the sector. A qualitative research approach was used to explore the use and practice of social media in depth. Primary data was collected using Interview, and document review was used for collecting secondary data from the literatures. The researcher developed a qualitative interview based on the practice of the PR department. The open-ended questions were asked to purposively selected participants like PR professionals and IT experts that are working in the PR department of MOIT. The researcher also conducted review of internal documents to triangulate and supplement the data obtained from the interview. For the data presentation and analysis thematic analysis was used because this has an ability to analyze the qualitative data. The findings revealed that social media platforms are moderately implemented in each phase of project implementation of MOIT in internal publics and policies and procedures are in place and implemented accordingly, but there are no standards, legal and regulatory framework for the social media platforms development. The interaction has been more from the organization to the public with few responses from the public. The researcher recommended that there should have been a need for more two way interaction between the organizations and their publics. This research recommends that the proper implementation of social media principles and more platforms are required, and standard i.e. 'social media implementation guide' in order to evaluate effectiveness and make improvements has to be established for future usage.

Keywords: offline, online

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has been defined by one of the scholars as the platform that connects people together by ignoring the geographical factor, and also the opportunity to produce and share it with the community. Thus, social media have changed the community into online community where the popular social media sites used by millions of people on a daily basis. Social media are the extension of traditional word of mouth networks, which is always the most effective tools of disseminating information, and with the enablement of technology, it allows anyone with internet connection to access and voice their opinion through the social media (Grunig, J. (2009).

Social media in the society is getting stronger and stronger day by day where the public are no longer passive in receiving information from traditional media since social media allows the general public to have more control of what they read, hear and watch. Therefore PR practitioners have re-examined the traditional communication methods and consider how they may apply their work to the online world at the common use of social media now (Martin, T. (2009).

1.1. Background of the Study

According to King, D. L. (2015), Technology has a way of influencing all areas of human life. With the advent of social media, public relations practitioners have changed thoughts about themselves and the practice even in government. Public relations refer to the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. It entails building sustainable relationships between an organization and all its publics in order to create a positive image. There has been a positive image of governments by the public since communication tends to be one sided; to inform the public.

According to Bernays, A. (2012), public relations can be described as the role of the management involved in the tabulation of the opinions of the public, description of procedures, policies and the interests of an entity followed by carrying out a plan to gain approval from the public. Public relations are considered as a planned and sustained aim to create and preserve

goodwill and mutual relationship between the public and an enterprise (Harrison, 2000:2). This can be achieved only through a rich communication medium, which is social media.

According to Decker, E. (2010), public relations are best defined as “a planned effort to influence public opinion through acceptance, performance and two-way communications.” Decker’s inclusion of two-way communication model brings out the very active characteristic of social media.

It is important to note the various ways in which social media has affected the habits of perception and thinking of public relations practitioners in government. The attainment of Electronic Government (or e-government) in Ethiopia is probably hailed as one of the major steps taken by the government towards the achievement of national development aims and goals for the creation of wealth and employment opportunities as articulated in vision 2022/23.

Social media, a relatively new phenomenon has gained currency as a tool to be used for communication as technology is rapidly changing too. There are multiple platforms offered in the dissemination of information, and technology is at the disposal of highly demanding public. This media has changed the way in which information is produced, distributed and displayed. Broom, T. (2009), observes that the internet is a manifestation of an ever-present means of communication considering that all the new forms of media rely on the internet. Among principles of effective communication is two-way communication. Today, with the advent of social media, public relations practitioners must program communication activities that permit audience response or feedback (Darrell, et al. 2013).

Social media according to Boyd and Ellison (2007) is a web-based application that enables users to (1) come up with a profile in a closed system, (2) form a collection of other users with similar ideas and connections, (3) look and go through their connections list and those created by others in the system.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In today’s society, organizational public relation practitioners must improve the way they communicate with their stakeholders and public to improve the image of their organization across the country and gain the support of all stakeholders. With the advances in technology, social media platforms provide organizational public practitioners another avenue to

communicate with stakeholders and publics. Effective communication can help build strong relationships between organizations and stakeholders and publics. Social media is another communication tool people use to connect with one another. King, D. (2015) stated, “One of the main reasons many people use social media is to connect with people they care about or are interested in.”

Public practitioners need to find effective ways to communicate with the people they care about, their stakeholders. Gross, M. (2010), explained “The new reality is that people expect us to be able to communicate with them via the channel(s) they choose.” This shows that social media is becoming a significant tool in public relations because of the advancement in communication technology. The data gathered from this study could guide the Ministry as well as public relations practitioners on how to use social media as an effective communication tool with stakeholders and the general public.

Social media have provided multiple channels for public relations practitioners to engage their publics directly without relying on the traditional media. The public relations practitioners have opportunities to share real time updates on activities of their organizations and receive immediate feedback from their publics. Some of the practitioners have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the social media to improve their professional practices and build global reputation for their organizations. On the other hand, there are some public relations practitioners who do not seem to consider social media as serious channels that can be employed for the advancement of public relations programmes. At best, they use social media for their personal interactions, leaving their organization’s publics at the mercy of rumor mongers in the social space.

As it has been seen in literature in developing countries Social Media practices do not have a good record; Ethiopia as a developing country shares the same problems in the sector. In addition to this, most studies about social media were foreign, and in Ethiopia it was extremely limited and still needs to be developed. Moreover, there was lack of right approach to implement social media as a main communication tool the Ministry of Innovation and Technology could use. Therefore, it was in the interest of filling this gap that the study intended to study the use of social media as a Public Relations tool in the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

1.3 Objectives of the study

General Objective: The general objective of this study is:

1. To assess the use of social media as a public relations tool within the Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

Specific objectives: The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the social media platforms public relations practitioners use in Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MOIT).
2. To show how the Ministry of Innovation and Technology uses social media as an important tool to reach out their internal and external publics.
3. To examine the effectiveness of using social media as a public relations tool by the MOIT.
4. To assess the extent to which the MOIT uses social media platforms.

1.4 Basic Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. Which social media platforms do public relations practitioners of Ministry of Innovation and Technology use the most?
2. What are the roles or uses of social media in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology?
3. To what extent is the Ministry of Innovation and Technology effective in using social media in communicating with their internal and external publics?
4. To what extent the Ministry of Innovation and Technology uses the social media?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Social media are the new technological phenomena. And there is a shortage of research material about the integration of social media and traditional media in Ethiopian context. Therefore, the study is significant to contribute to fill the knowledge gap in understanding the general characteristics of the use of social media utilization in public relations practice. In addition, the

study can help policy makers to have a better insight on how social media is changing the process of information flow. It helps them to understand that, how the social media agenda are raised and processed as well as expand by opinion leaders. Therefore, they can understand how the country's media landscape is using social media in setting public agenda that have a greater impact to the nation.

The result can also be used as a framework for other researchers to have ground information about the study target government ministry and public relations practitioners. It can help them to escalate their research in the area, especially the use of social media as a public relations tool in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations that should be taken into account when analyzing the findings. Such as:

- The sample selected for this research was only one government ministry, which may have slanted its findings.
- This study investigated only the use of social media as public relations tool. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to the negative impacts of social media sites not mentioned in this study.
- This research selected small number of interview participants. Therefore, the small sample size made the researcher unable to make reasonable generalization to the study.
- The study was conducted using only qualitative research method with the use of open-ended questions.
- This study identified that there is still no clear research on defining or measuring social media success in the government ministry.
- This study also identified that there was limited number of literature review related to the study topic.
- The study identified that the use of social media in public relations today is limited. Public relations practitioners of Ministry of Innovation and Technology are hesitating to use social media because of concerns with privacy as well as the lack of understanding.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the background of the study including objectives, statement of the problem, aim of the study, scope and limitations of the study. Chapter two contains the literature review and the social media theories. Chapter three presents the methodology which includes the research design; sampling technique, sample size and data collection instruments. Chapter four analyses the data collected from interview. Finally, chapter five summarizes the research findings and makes recommendations for future research.

1.8 Definition of key terms

Information Communication Technology (ICT): is defined as an umbrella that consists of hardware, software, networks, and media for collection, storage, processing, transmission, and presentation of information (World Bank Group, 2003).

Social Media (SM): Internet-based applications and websites that promote the sharing of user generated content, communication, and participation on a large scale” (Cooper, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Theories and past studies related to the use of social media as a public relations tool in government organizations exist. The current chapter seeks to review some of the key theories and literatures so as to set the theoretical framework and conceptual insights to the study. The chapter has three aims. First, the chapter seeks to provide a firm foundation for theoretical and conceptual framework for the study as this has a significant bearing in interpretations of the findings of the study. Secondly, this chapter seeks to acknowledge, discuss and appraise the scholarly contributions to the topic of study and the related concepts, and thereby expose the existing state of knowledge in so far as the topic of discussion is concerned. Lastly, the chapter seeks to establish the research gaps in the present body of knowledge, and the role of the present study in bridging the identified research gaps. This chapter gives insights essential for interpretation of the findings of the study and further justifies the study.

2.2 Trends of ICT in Ethiopia

2.2.1 Background of MCIT/MOIT

The Ethiopian government established the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), which is now called Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MOIT) in 2010 recognizing the critical role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the national development. It is envisioned to make every aspect of Ethiopian life is ICT assisted by developing, deploying information and Communication Technology that would improve the livelihood of every Ethiopian, and optimize its contribution to the development of the country.

The major responsibilities of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology are:

- Implement Communication and Information Technology policy by formulating short, medium and long-term Communication and Information programs,
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of Communication and Information Technology projects and programs,

- Develop frameworks for the development of Communication and Information Technology in sectors such as Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, Education, Health, etc.
- Formulate projects and programs to guide Communication and Information Technology development with focus on strengthening ongoing initiatives in all the sectors aimed at improved service delivery and enhancing good governance.

MCIT/MOIT is organized into five divisions that are E-Government Directorate, Standard and Regulatory Directorate, Capacity Building Directorate, ICT Private Sector Development Coordination Directorate and Telecommunication and Postal Development Coordination Office (The organizational structure is annexed) The Project Management Office (PMO) is part of the E-Government Directorate of MCIT/MOIT and supports the e-Government Strategy implementation through monitoring project delivery, controlling the relationships with vendors, managing the procurement process, ensuring compliance with policies and standards, auditing projects at hand over, knowledge management and sharing in areas related to project management.

2.2.2 Policy and Procedures of ICT in Ethiopia

The ICT sector in Ethiopia is led by strong involvement from the government side. The government has a strong commitment to address the infrastructure development and service expansion throughout the country. The national telecommunication services operator, Ethio Telecom provides fixed, mobile and Internet services ranging from 2G up to 4G. It has also been working towards stimulating the demand for the underlying infrastructure by increasing access to the public sector network.

2.2.3 IT Policy

The Government of Ethiopia has made the development of Information and communications technology one of its strategic plan priorities. The endorsed and currently enforce ICT policy is a presentment of its dedication to the development of ICT both as an industry and as an enabler of all-rounded socioeconomic transformation. ICT in Ethiopia at present is in its early phase of growth. The major indicators pointing to the low degree of ICT Development area:

- The absence of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks.
- Limitations in telecommunications infrastructure and low degree of internet services penetration.
- Lack of organized information and data resources, and poor accessibility to those that exist.
- Lack of skilled human resources coupled with low ICT literacy.
- Underdeveloped private sector.

To address these constraints, the Government recognizing the importance of Information and Communication Technology development has endorsed an ICT policy and strategy in 2009. The reach of ICT policy covers knowledge and information as a tool for development & ICT as a sector or industry. There is strong belief and commitment that apart from being as enabler of socioeconomic development, ICT also supports the country's on-going process of democratization and good governance.

According to the ICT policy document (MCIT, 2009), the primary objectives of the ICT policy are listed as follows:

- Build ICT Infrastructure throughout the country and make it approachable.
- Create the necessary skilled human resources required for the proper development and application of ICT and expand the society's basic knowledge and usage of it.
- Develop the necessary legal framework for the application of ICT and design and implement appropriate security systems for the prevention of unlawful practices.
- Promote the use of ICT for modernizing the civil and public services to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery so as to promote good governance and reduce wastage of resources.
- Expand and strengthen the role of the private sector to ensure the rapid development of ICT.

Ethiopia's ICT policy is one of the fundamental components of the country's socioeconomic development goals and objectives. Hence, then focuses on the policy are in the following areas which are considered strategic for the success of ICT growth.

- Planning, implementation and development of ICT infrastructure
- Human resource development and capacity building
- ICT's legal systems and protection

- ICT for governance /E-Government/; Especially:
 - ICT in the education sector
 - ICT for improved health
 - ICT for agricultural modernization
- ICT industry and private sector growth
- ICT for research and development

2.2.4 e-government Strategy of the government of Ethiopia

The e-government strategy that was approved in 2011 envisages the implementation of two hundred nineteen e-services comprising of seventy nine informational and one hundred forty transactional services over a five-year period. Implementation of e-services were proposed through 12 priority projects and service delivery was through four primary channels, namely Portals, Call Centers, Mobile devices and Community ICT centers(MCIT ,2011). The Strategy has been designed keeping the ten guiding principles of e-Government:

Precept 1: E-government is about government rather than “e”

Precept 2: E-government is citizen-centric and criteria-based

Precept 3: E-government prefers in-house expertise to out-of-house expertise

Precept 4: E-government is wary in introducing private sector practices

Precept 5: E-government prefers open source to proprietary software

Precept 6: E-government is networked government and not integrated government

Principle 7: E-government promotes the CIO concept in e-government

Precept 8: E-government is introduced through an organization-wide e-business program

Principle 9: E-government provides multi-channel delivery of public services

Principle 10: E-government promotes the causes of e-citizen and e-democracy (Misra, 2008)

In summation to the above mentioned tasks, common applications that horizontally cut across all ministries have been projected to be implemented. These include initiatives like E-Procurement, Human resource Management System, E-Office, E-Mail and Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS).

Established on the strategy, most of the objects have been attained in the first Growth and transformation plan (GTPI) period of the execution. Ethiopia's first information technology park which is called as "Ethio ICT Village" is also inaugurated and began operation recently. The park is based on a 200 hectare site.

The IT Park is being built with a perspective of building an Information Technology (IT) village based on the tight linkage between research, industry and business in IT and IT enabled services and is expected to draw foreign investors as good as local ones. The IT Park has various functional zones like business, assembly and warehouse, commercial, administrative and Knowledge Park. The main focal point of the park is to attract IT, manufacturing, development of the IT services industry and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO).

2.2.5 Ethiopian ICT sector Performance on International ICT indices

The IDI is one of the indices that measures ICT readiness using three sub-indices (detailed below): infrastructure and access, use, and skills (ITU, 2016).

- The infrastructure and access sub-index captures ICT readiness and includes five indicators (fixed telephone, mobile telephone, international internet bandwidth, households with computers, and households with internet).
- The employment sub-index captures ICT intensity and includes three ICT indicators (internet users, fixed [wired] broadband, and mobile broadband).
- The skills sub-index captures ICT capability and includes three proxy indicators (adult literacy, gross secondary enrollment, and gross tertiary enrolment). This sub-indicator is given less weight than the other two sub-indices in the calculation of the IDI.

Ethiopia ranked very low, at 169th out of 175 countries, on the 2016 IDI. Ethiopia's standing was well below Mozambique, Tanzania, and Malawi, countries that also hit low in the IDI.

2.3 Concept of Social Media

The social media trend has exploded worldwide because of the ease of electronic communication and cellular technology. In fact, Klososky (2012) referred to this trend as a tool to provide companies and individuals the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with each other. Boyd and Ellison (2008) defined social media network sites as:

...web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Some examples of social media network sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and blogs. Social network sites provide user's opportunities to articulate make social networks available to users and connect users to strangers and individuals that would usually not be made (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Similarly, social media is an informal platform that provides useful, informative and consistent interactive communication to stakeholders said Catherine Gluckstein, president of Sum All (Thompson, 2013). The good thing about using social media tools is the cost is minimal for public practitioners of organizations of any size (Klososky, 2012).

“Social media refers to sites that allow the uploading of videos, documents, graphics/photos or presentations and share them with the world” (Klososky, 2012, p.42). In the same way, Martin (2014) said “modern-day users rely on social media for virtually everything they used to turn to traditional websites, emails, and search engines for: communicating, shopping, researching, disseminating content, staying informed, and finding new friends and fans” (p. 20). According to Klososky (2012), social media tools can build relationships like no other element.

According to Schaffer (2013), there are over 50 social media networks and over 10,000,000 members of those networks. A Pew Research Center survey found, 73% of online adults use social networking sites with Facebook being the most dominant site used (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Certain social media sites have been popular among different demographics. For example, Facebook is popular with a variety of demographic groups (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Pinterest is popular among females (Duggan & Smith, 2013). LinkedIn is widely used by college graduates and high-income households (Duggan & Smith, 2013), and Twitter and Instagram are becoming popular with young adults, urban dwellers, and non-Whites (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most frequently engaged sites by users according to the Pew Research Internet Project (2013).

Facebook users visit the site at least once per day 63% of the time compared to Instagram users at 57% and Twitter users at 46% (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Of the five social networking sites in the Pew Research Center, Facebook is the most widely used by online adults at 71% followed by

LinkedIn at 22%, Pinterest at 21%, Twitter at 18% and Instagram at 17% (Duggan & Smith, 2013). With the advent of smart phones, 40% of cell phone users utilize a social networking site on their phone (Pew, 2013). According to Schaffer, M. (2013), 60% of Facebook and 79% of Twitter followers often recommend sites to other social media users. As a result, organizations that use Facebook and Twitter could reach more stakeholders if other social media users recommend their Facebook and Twitter accounts. Social media have become a common topic in both public relations practice and research.

However, there is no one definition for the concept that has been agreed upon. Many studies provide their own definition, while others assume that there is some common meaning.

Wright and Hinson (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b) began in 2006 a longitudinal study on social media use by public relations practitioners. Each year they have conducted an online survey about practitioners' behaviors and attitudes regarding different social media tools. At first the studies focused mostly on blogs, but they have evolved to incorporate new tools as they are invented. Despite their years of studying social media, Wright and Hinson (2009b) claimed, "it still is difficult to define exactly what social media are" (p. 3). Even though they recognized the difficulty with defining such a concept, Wright and Hinson (2009b) developed their own definition and argued that "social media deliver web-based information created by people with the intention of facilitating communication."

The definition that is the most commonly seen in public relations research is Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition, which described social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 60). Based on this definition, they came up with six categories of social media: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While such a list is useful when applying a definition or making it more tangible, the original definition is important because when new tools arise the definition gives parameters that help distinguish whether the new tools are social media or not (Chaffee, 1991).

Although Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition is the most cited, it fails to address social media's ability build and manage relationships, as well as its ability to facilitate multidirectional

dialogue (Lee, Tisdale & Diddams, 2012). These qualities of social media are particularly important in public relations, making them necessary additions to the definition.

A central part of the practice of public relations is Organization-Public Relationships (OPR). Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) posited that OPR:

...are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. (p.18) OPR models, such as that by Hung (2002), explain relationship antecedents, maintenance strategies and outcomes. Antecedents are necessary factors for OPRs to exist, meaning one party must have consequences on the other (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham, 2003). Maintenance strategies are simply techniques to cultivate good relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2003). Finally, relationship outcomes are qualities of a relationship that are measurable (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2007; Ledingham, 2003). Research has shown that social media is particularly useful for building and cultivating relationships (Levenshus, 2010; Sweetser, 2010), making it a valuable aspect when defining social media (Lee et al., 2012).

Another important quality of social media is its ability to facilitate multi-directional dialogue (Lee et al., 2012). Communication is traditionally thought of as being one-way or two-way, but social media platforms allow multiple users to communicate simultaneously in multiple directions as illustrated by the multi-directional communication model (Thackeray & Neiger, 2009). In this model, the original sender or creator of a message will often lose control of its dissemination (Thackeray & Neiger, 2009). Keeping the importance of OPR and dialogue in mind, Lee et al. (2012), Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition and defined social media as "an electronic communication platform built along the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 for multi-directional communication, which enables the development and facilitation of dialogues and organizational public relationships." This definition of social media will be used throughout this thesis.

2.4 Social media and web. 2.0

Emergent media has appeared during the 21st century placing tremendous opportunities for organizations in order to communicate better with publics. The cutting edge of this new media is well known as social media, part of the Web 2.0 revolution. The term Web 2.0 was coined in 1999 by IT consultant Darcy Di Nucci and later popularized in 2004 by O'Reilly (Visser,2010). Web 2.0 is web applications that facilitate collaboration and exchange of information. Web 2.0 can be defined as “the effects of extensive collaboration and user participation on the marketplace and corporate world” (Visser, 2010: 14). Web 2.0 is a powerful tool that can help organizations to improve their collaborative knowledge to impact customer relations and corporate culture (Hearn et al, 2008). With the emergence of Web 2.0 platforms, the way we communicate through internet has changed, and social media for communication has become a central tool for organizations (Kim et al, 2010).

Social media can include internet applications such as YouTube, Flickr, Wikipedia, social bookmarking, blogs or micro blogs (Twitter), and social networking sites as for example, MySpace and Facebook (Hearn et al, 2008). Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites as web-based services that allow people to create a public or semi-public profile, and have a list of other users that share a connection. For these authors, the first social network site (using their definition of social network site) appeared in 1997 with Six Degrees, a tool helping people to connect with others that let users send messages. After that, a myriad of social network sites have appeared, being today the most popular, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Presently with the advent of Web 2.0 platforms, companies no longer have the absolute power to control corporate information; therefore, stakeholders are claiming more transparency, open communication, and engagement through social media platforms.

2.5 The Importance of Social Media for Communication

Social media has impacted the practice of communication and public relations since the beginning of blogs (Wright & Hinson, 2010). Recently, social media has been also an interesting topic for researching different approaches in the public relations field (Briones et al, 2011; Schultz, et al, 2011; Avery et al, 2010; Sweetser, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2010; Hearn et al, 2008). Although 84% of the public relations practitioners think that social media is a low-cost

tool to improve relationships with publics (Wright & Hinson, 2009), social network sites are not being employed in its fully dialogic potential by corporations (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Wright and Hinson (2010) have asked a particular question to public relations practitioners in order to know how these emergent technologies have impacted the communications field. The last study (2010) concluded that 83% of the respondents believe that social media have changed how corporations communicate in contrast to previous years (73% in 2009, 61% in 2008, 58% in 2007).

The advancement of new technologies had brought new opportunities for the corporate communication field, because organizations not only can publish information, but measure also the effectiveness of the communication process (Argenti, 2006). Social media platforms create opportunities for organizations to have real conversations with internal and external publics. For stakeholders, social media also brings opportunities because it is easier for them to be watchdogs and track companies with unethical communication behaviors (Sweetser, 2010). For that reason, companies cannot run away and disappear from social media channels; they need to be more present than ever to promote conversations with stakeholder “The value of social media is that users are highly engaged and wanted to be heard” (Burston - Marsteller, 2010: 2).

Up-to-date there are no studies analyzing the use and importance of social media sites as a corporate communication tool by Innovation and Technology Ministry. Similar investigations examined the employment of social media by Fortune companies. McCorkindale (2010) studied Facebook member and fan pages of Fortune 50 companies of 2009 in order to determine how companies disseminate information, provide relationship maintenance, and maintain levels of engagement. Using a content analysis methodology, a total of 55 pages were coded. Results shown that while corporations are posting news and mission statements, the majority of the companies are not using Facebook in its fully extent.

Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) examined how Fortune companies are using Twitter to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders. Using a content analysis methodology as well, 93 Twitter company profiles and 930 individual tweets were considered for the use of dialogic features within Twitter. They concluded that 61% of the organizations were classified as dialogical and 39% non-dialogic and both types of companies did not differ in the results at the moment of providing information. Dialogic type-companies obtained higher results than non

dialogic at the moment of employing the dialogic features of conservation of visitors (encouragement of visitors to stay on the site), and generation of return visits (incentive to users to return to the site). As research in social media, corporate communication, and public relations continues to grow, corporations around the world will understand the powerful role that social media has for internal and external communications.

2.6 The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Social Media in PR

2.6.1 Advantages of Social Media in PR

Sharing of ideas: Social networking sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events and interests within their individual networks. Web based social networking services make it possible to connect people who share interests and activities across political, economic and geographic borders.

Tool of communication: Social networks are increasingly being used by teachers and learners as a communication tool. Teachers create chat rooms, forums and groups to extend classroom discussion to posting assignments, tests and quizzes, to assisting with homework outside of the classroom setting. Learners can also form groups over the social networking sites and engage in discussion over a variety of topics.

Bridges communication gap: Social media bridges the distance among different people. It offers platforms for online users to find others who share the same interests and build virtual communities based on those shared interests. With the availability of social media technologies and services, content sharing and user interaction has become relatively easy and efficient.

Source of information: Content generating and sharing sites serve as sources of information for various topics. Users can search for content, download and use the content available on these sites free of cost.

Important marketing tool: Social media is widely used by most of the firms/organizations to market their products/services in the society. The companies resort to social networking sites to generate opinions on the existing and future products that are available in the market. This is an excellent marketing strategy undertaken by most of the companies to draw consumers and elicit public opinion. Such comments or opinions help the organization to redesign their products.

Such social networking and user appraisal sites are an important way of promoting products and generating opinions.

Important customer interaction tool: Social Media Networking is perfect for customer interaction, customer feedback, and customer support. New business contacts can be obtained for networking purposes.

Important crisis communication tool: When the major forms of public relations tool fail, social media can be used extensively to communicate with the general public regarding any crisis situation that might have gripped the nation or any organization. But it is important to remember that while social media can have a positive impact during natural disasters; it can have a less favorable effect during business crises, in which case, corporate communication teams need to understand how they can use social media to their advantage. Communications landscape has changed thanks to social media, especially during times of crisis.

Low Costs/ Cost effective: It is cheaper to use online social networking for both personal and business use because most of it is usually free. Unlike in other forms of media like electronic or print, one has to pay a certain amount of money for a news item to get published. A person can scout out potential customers and target markets with just a few clicks and keystrokes.

Less time consuming: Social media is an effective time management medium of communication both for business as well as for academic purposes. One can post a message or browse for any information at the click of a button. This is an added advantage in comparison to print and other electronic media like television and radio, though one can get the updates in television, yet social media channels provide impromptu information and connection with the people that matters most.

2.6.2 Disadvantages of Social Media

Intrusion into privacy: Social Networking sites are part of everyday life and for many of us a primary way in which we keep in touch with friends and family. Privacy is a huge problem in such networks. This becomes a serious issue when the users are targeted on the basis of their location, age etc. leading to kidnapping and murder. Very often it has been seen that most of the people who have opened accounts in social networking sites does not reveal their true identity

leading to fake personal information and misleading people. The younger are at a serious danger of being misled by such people. Problems of harassment, cyber stalking and online scams can frequently be seen in day to day affairs.

Breakdown in familial ties: When people get addicted to social networking sites, there is a breakdown in the family ties. This is because the person gets hooked on the sites for communication with friends. Youngsters specially feel free to discuss their problems and share stories with their peer rather their parents or close relatives. So, in the long run, the close bond with the immediate family breaks down.

Reduction in worker productivity: Frequent usage of social media can have an influence on worker productivity. Employees may waste valuable time using Social Media Networking.

Slightly Impersonal – Social media will never be able to beat the advantage of dealing with consumers face-to face, yet many organizations still come make it seem like they don't really care about their followers by using things such as auto DMs on Twitter. When an organization auto DMs a new follower it makes it seem like they don't not have time to have a quick look at the followers profile for a few seconds. It is far better to say nothing than to send an automated, uncaring message to a potential custom.

2.7 Social Media in Public Relations

Social media has quickly emerged as an essential tool for public relations professionals. However, just ten years ago, the Internet in general was a low priority for practitioners (Hill & White, 2000). Although much research is being done in the area (Hill & White, 2000; Levenshus, 2010), technology is changing as quickly as studies can be conducted and published; furthermore, the long-term effects of social media are yet to be fully explored.

A study by Hill and White in 2000 shows how quickly the tools used by public relations practitioners can change. They found that in 2000, Internet strategy was low priority for public relations practitioners. However, they did find that even at that time practitioners recognized the Internet as a potential tool to manage relationships with publics (Hill & White, 2000). "A Web site was not viewed as a replacement for face-to-face contact, but it was perceived as a way to strengthen relationships that already existed, mainly because of the e-mail function" (Hill

&White, 2000, p.42). The use of online tools has grown exponentially since 2000 both for public relations practitioners and the population in general, giving researchers a whole new area to study.

Recently, many studies have examined the use of new technology by public relations practitioners (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Sha & Dozier, 2012; Wright & Hinson, 2009b). New technologies more recently adopted are social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, YouTube and Pinterest. The adoption of social media has come at an accelerated pace. In 2008, the use of blogs and podcasts was common among PR professionals, but social networking sites were still utilized by only 24 percent of practitioners (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). Today, social networking is considered as an essential part of most public relations campaigns. The use of social networking tools is part of a trend that emphasizes the importance of two-way or multi-directional communication in public relations rather than the dissemination of information (Deuze, 2007; Van Ruler, Vercic, Buetschi, & Flodin, 2004; Wright & Hinson, 2009b).

Wright and Hinson (2008a, 2009b) have found that most public relations professionals believe that the use of social media has had a positive impact on public relations. They have also found that about 85 percent of public relations professionals believe that these new tools and traditional media complement each other rather than compete (Wright & Hinson, 2009b). A greater number of public relations practitioners believe that blogs and social media impact what traditional news media outlets choose to cover (Wright & Hinson, 2008a, 2009b). However, the same study found that public relations professionals gave traditional media outlets higher scores on ethics, credibility, accuracy and truth (Wright & Hinson, 2008a, 2009b). This shows that although the benefits of social media are recognized by the industry, traditional media remains important and is seen as more trustworthy.

2.8 Types of social media platforms

Social media will always keep developing; the principles that govern behavior, interaction and support will remain constant. The role of social media will always be primarily the creation of communities and enabling of conversations among their members. Gorry and Westbrook (2009), identify social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis, Flickr, and YouTube.

These social media platforms altogether have garnered more than a billion users. These platforms enable more than friendly conversation and individual expression; they facilitate remarkably diverse and broad participation while accelerating the formation of effective collaborations. Social media tools are categorized based on their functionality, into various groups. These groups include blogs, message boards, podcasts, micro blogs, bookmarks, networks, communities, and wikis.

Facebook. “A popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues” (WhatIs.com)

Twitter. “A service for friends, family, and coworkers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. People post Tweets, which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text.”(<https://support.twitter.com/articles/13920>)

Instagram. “An online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them either publicly or privately on the app, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr.”(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram>)

Blog. “An abbreviated version of "weblog," which is a term used to describe websites that maintain an ongoing chronicle of information. A blog features diary-type commentary and links to articles on other websites, usually presented as a list of entries in reverse chronological order.” (<https://codex.wordpress.org/>)

2.9 Roles of Social Media, Two-way communication and PR

Social media can help to build up good PR as it allows the public to engage directly with the organization which will build trust and better relationships among them. The increasing popularity of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, have contributed to the rapid growth of consumer based medium. This is further reflected that more than 50% of people are using social media to learn about what is happening in the world rather than the official news source. Thus, the nature of social media sites reveals a potential chance for PR to generate trust and relationships amongst users.

The emerging of social media in PR has caused press releases, articles and events to become less effective than before because the audience and their preferred channels of information have

changed. Besides that, both PR practitioners and journalists perceive that social media has helped them to enhance the source-reporter relationship as they are able to interact with each other without any barriers. With the emerging of social media, it has brought in the “old” and “new” rules of press release into PR practice where the “new” press release will be delivered directly to target publics via the web.

Social media is an open environment where it allows the users to talk back if they do or do not like what the organization is doing or saying. In this view, social media encourages two-way symmetrical communication among its users. It has allowed PR practitioners to change their communication way which they will personally reach as well as interact with the public and stakeholders, and will end up for mutual beneficial relationships. PR in Ethiopia faces major challenges since the increasing popularity of social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Furthermore, Internet has become a new phenomenon for PR to communicate directly with the audience and this causes the PR practitioners now to be heavily equipped with Internet facilities. Social media has changed the setting of the PR in many ways, and the most significant change is the shift from one-way PR communication to a two-way or multi-way communication.

The organization now is communicating via social media platforms which allow them to have one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many communication, and this has transformed the PR practice. Furthermore, the practice of two-way communication by PR falls under the two-way symmetrical communication in the modern era, and the key elements of this model allows the organization to engage in a real conversation or dialogues with the stakeholders not only persuading them but also to listen, learn as well as to adapt organizational behavior in order to achieve the communication process. PR practitioners that are engaging in two-way symmetrical communication model, it will help them to make the organization be more effective in communicating with the public. PR practitioners that practice the two-way symmetrical model rely on honest two-way communication where there is give-and-take rather than focus on one-way approach in two-way symmetric, the PR not only are able to send out the message on their own interest but also reach a solution that is acceptable to the other side.

2.10 Social Media among PR Practitioners

The widespread of social media among the PR practitioners has revealed the term of ‘Public Relations (PR) 2.0’. Web 2.0 social media has helped PR to put their public back in their practice. In the digital era, the PR practitioners no longer emphasize in messaging and relationship management but towards the practice of overseeing the online community as a resource. This has created new job descriptions into PR practice including ‘social media strategist’, ‘online community manager’, and ‘digital care manager’. Digital PR will have the opportunity to directly persuade their audience by answering their questions, provide more information to the public as well as explaining to them especially when they are unsatisfied with the organizations’ products or services. Digital PR is involved in disseminating information like issuing the online news release or any updates regarding its organization services to the stakeholders, as well as leveraging the power of journalism networks. Other than that, social media has also assisted PR in the area of publicity.

Several studies have confirmed those buyers in the journey of making decision. Buyers will look for the products service information in their own way especially through the internet rather than using traditional marketing communication. Therefore, the uses of social media would have helped PR practitioners to reduce the cost of communication and advertising indirectly. Social media is not only for interactive and communication, it has also become an essential platform to allow PR practitioners to access wider area of information in order to make their thinking, idea, and insight more knowledgeable.

The evolution of the new media technology has met the requirements in creating an effective as well as an interactive online social media to the users where the users can easily consume (read, listen, watch, download, search), share (publish, upload), communicate (post status, comment, chatting, rate), facilitate (tag, recommend) online. Social media tends to be a more interactive platform when it engages with the smart devices and web-based technologies which the community or individual social media users are able to share, communicate, create, modify and discuss user-generated content. The social media has offered a way for the users to keep in touch not only with the existing communities that belongs offline but also to those people who do not normally communicate for a long period of time. So, it is more obvious that the social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc., are extensively being used by the users for the purpose

of communication. Besides that, in the advance era of technology, embracing social media is no longer a strategic business option but is a requirement as well a huge opportunity for an organization.

This is because of the interactive computing system that explores social media across various areas (sports, education, entertainment, politics, analysis of video broadcast, climate change), has become a media monitoring tools for the organization to provide the flows of relevant information, timely feedback from the public, as well as the stakeholder perception through the human-computer interaction. This approach is encouraging two-way communication among the organization and its publics, ultimately opening the opportunity for building up mutually beneficial relationships. Thus, social media sites have been prefigured as innovative interactions that allow for network communication to occur instantaneously.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

2.11.1 Technological Determinism Theory

The theory of technological Determinism relates to the studies conducted by Marshall McLuhan who slates that we are living in a new age of technology that has never been experienced before. Studying media and culture in England, McLuhan found himself trying to decipher the media environment that surrounded him. The people that lived through the inventions of the phonetic alphabet, the printing press, and the telegraph saw drastic improvements in the way people were able to communicate. It is sometimes known as the "Oracle of the Electronic Age." McLuhan is telling people that the new electronic media is changing the way people think, act, and feel. McLuhan suspects that the current technological environment, when looked hack upon, will be seen as a major turning point in the history of communication.

It is a theory that presumes the media is the key element in mass communications processes that evoked widespread controversy during the 1960s mostly due to the colorful writing of Marshall McLuhan, a professor of English. McLuhan declared that each medium alters our physical environment, imposing on us a particular pattern of perceiving and thinking that controls us to an extent we scarcely suspect.

Most interpretations of technological determinism share two general ideas:

- I. The development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and
- II. Technology in turn has "effects" on societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced because that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced.

Strict adherents to technological determinism do not believe the influence of technology differs based on how much a technology is or can be used. Instead of considering technology as part of a larger spectrum of human activity, technological determinism sees technology as the basis for all human activity McLuhan, M. (2009).

2.11.2 Dialogic Theory

Dialogic theory argues that organizations should be willing to interact with publics in honest and ethical ways in order to create effective organization-public communication channels (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five dialogic principles that could guide organizations to establish mediated, two-way, and dialogic relationships with publics. These principles involved (1) dialogic loops, (2) ease of interface, (3) conservation of visitors, (4) generation of return visits, and (5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics. A handful of public relations studies have examined how various organizations build dialogic relationships with publics through weblogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Traynor et al., 2008) and social networking sites including Facebook (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009) and Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). These studies often examine how organizations employ dialogic principles on their social media.

For instance, Bortree and Seltzer (2009) examined whether dialogic strategies used by environmental advocacy groups on their Facebook profiles led to greater dialogic engagement between organizations and visitors. Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) studied how *Fortune* 500 companies used Twitter to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders and found that organizations with a dialogic orientation to Twitter use were more likely to employ the dialogic principle of conservation of visitors than organizations with a non-dialogic orientation to Twitter.

2.11.3 The Media Richness Theory

The media richness theory in the opinion of Martin (2009) is based on the assumption that the purpose of any communication is to resolve ambiguity and reduce uncertainty. It states that the different types of social media differ in the degree of richness they possess and based on capacity to convey multiple verbal and nonverbal signals, ability to allow immediate feedback, usage of natural language, and presence of personal focus. Accordingly, some social media are more effective than other in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty. Messages that are less equivocal do not require rich media. Instead, lean media should adequately carry these messages.

In the hierarchy of media richness, face-to-face communication is the richest followed by telephone, electronic mail, and print communications (Katz & Lazarsfeld 2010). Therefore, applying the theories discussed above to social media, people may be influenced either positively or negatively depending on the amount and type of information that needs to be processed and transmitted (media richness), personal reasoning or perception (social cognition) and the degree of socialization needed (social presence).

Media richness theory argues that performance improves when team members use “richer” media for equivocal tasks Dennis & kinney (2008). This is true if the social media can be incorporated in public relations practice. For social media has been promoted in academic literature as one of the best was to open up the organization to dialogue and build ongoing relationships with publics (Grunig 2009, Kelleher 2007 and Kelleher and Miller 2006) . Robson & James (2013) clarify that social media is a tool for achieving PR practice objectives. Some authors suggest the social media sphere requires organizations to be transparent, authentic, give up control, engage, collaborate, and be personal, relevant and speedy with their communication (Hearn, Foth, & Gray, 2008; Henderson & Bowley, 2010). This makes it more richer media for government PR.

2.11.4 The Media Ecology Theory

Marshall McLuhan is renowned for his theory that modern technology will affect the lives of we conduct. The speeds of existing commerce will definitely be increasing towards modern railway. Simultaneously, he believes that the way of people’s life would be changing due to media’s evolution. The future communication media will influence our life as many industries currently

transform their own communication system to a whole new level such as video conferencing with people in the other parts of the world. McLuhan & Powers also state that new media allow “users become consumers and producers.” Facebook, Pinterest, and YouTube serve as a platform to transform this prediction into reality. Therefore, consumers have more way to share their idea, opinion, and interaction with others. In conclusion, PR practitioners must be able to control the flow of communication in order to engage consumers and employees effectively.

During McLuhan’s time, has predicted that people can become both producers and consumers of information by using new media. Recent studies found out that social media can deliver information or message much more easily and efficiently than traditional media, therefore PR practitioners have changed the other way of information distribution. Thus, the flow of communication is altered from one way communication to two way communication to interact with the public. From this point of view, McLuhan’s theory can explain why and how the lives of PR practitioners, consumers, and organizations will be changed by social media and how media’s evolution will continue controlling the flow of communication. However, his theory has also shown that this is why PR practitioners, organizations in particular, must learn how to use social media to communicate with strategy audiences effectively.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Methodology illustrates the choices undertaken in the process of carrying out an inquiry. Martin, T. (2009) defined methodology as, choices researchers make about the cases to study, methods of data gathering and other forms of data analysis, etc., in planning and executing a research study, while Dury, H. (2008) link methodology to rules followed in an inquiry.

3.2 Research Design

An exploratory approach was followed where interviews were asked to gain insights from the participants about the topic and seek answers to the research questions. This study settled on a case study as a strategy to put the study in a more practical context. Case study research is associated with the investigation of a particular place, community, setting or organization (Bell & Emory 2011). Case studies are preferred, because they provide a suitable context in which certain research questions are answered (Eikermann, Hajj & Peterson 2009). The research participants have been Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology employees who are in charge of posting or tweeting and updating messages on the Ministry's website and using social media to interact with their stakeholders or with the firm and the public via social media. Thus, those people were interviewed to find out the uses of social media as a public relations tool in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

3.3 Research Participants

The interviews were conducted with six employees, PR professionals and IT experts from MOIT with an average of around 10 years of experience in the field. The reason for only having six participants for the research was, to ensure that adequate time could be allocated to each of the participants to tell their story and for the researcher to be able to do the analysis. The selection criteria of the participants was based on individuals who have had knowledge or experience on social media use and who have been in charge of social media platforms in the organization, and they were recruited through personal contact. Among the six participants there were two PR practitioners, two IT experts, one editor and the manager. All the interviews were conducted in English language because the participants could communicate well in English.

Each qualitative interview took approximately 35-45 minutes except for the Ministry manager and IT experts whose interview took around 90 minutes each in view of their in-depth knowledge of the field. The interviews were recorded with Tecno-mobile sound recorder App. They were then fully converted into text for data analysis as demonstrated in the following part of this chapter. The interviews began with a brief introduction by the researcher to make sure that the purpose of the research was understood and to brief the participants on their role and rights in terms of confidentiality and the format of the interview. Some participants were more encouraged to take part after knowing that the interview could be anonymous.

3.4 Qualitative Interview Questions

Qualitative interview questions were addressed to the participants and they were given the opportunity to elaborate, paving the way for new questions and dialogue prompts. Through the open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to “talk” about their experiences a type of “contemporary storytelling” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008; McNamaram, 2009) providing “rich data” (Ryan et al 2009, Hollaway & Wheeler 2010).

3.5 Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure was purposive; there was definite focus to choose only six employees who were in charge of disseminating information and post updates to the public via social media. The purpose for this specific selection was based on the logic that these individuals have had experience and knowledge concerning use of social media. Moreover, Ministry of Innovation and Technology was considered as representative of fields that constantly use social media.

3.6 Data Collection

Primary Sources: Interviews

As this is an exploratory study, qualitative interviews have been used as recommended by Saunders et al (2012). According to reviewed literature, qualitative interviews have been used in several research studies on social networking phenomena (Shklovski 2012), (Young 2011) and Al-Saggaf (2011). The three researchers have found this method to be useful and has helped in generating valuable outcomes.

Qualitative interview is one of the most popular methods in qualitative research that seeks “to discover, explain, and generate ideas/theories about the phenomenon under investigation; (and) to understand and explain social patterns (the “How” questions) (HesseBiber & Leavey 2006).” Because of its flexibility, the researcher has the ability to vary the order and wording of the questions (Power et al 2010), provide clarification to any ambiguities in terminology that may arise, and in some cases ask additional questions to probe for more information from respondents where needed. This flexibility in the research method of data collection allows for further exploration into an issue that may not have been considered in the original research design. The open nature of the questions allows for new concepts to emerge which in turn assists in collecting of rich data (Hand, 2003, Dearnley, 2005).

Interview guide was developed and this helped to guide the flow of the interviews. Interview is the most widely employed method in qualitative research because they allow a thorough examination of experiences, feelings or opinions (Gorry& Westbrook 2009). These interviews will take a semi-structured format because the opinions of the informant will be important to this research and qualitative interviews allow for flexibility (Bell & Emory 2011). Based on the success of this method in previous similar studies, qualitative interviews were used. The interviews, conducted with the minister, editor, PR professionals and IT experts between March 1st and March 31st provided important background and contextual material for the study.

Secondary Sources: Document Analysis

Utilizing existing data for research is becoming more prevalent and once analyzed they can offer methodological benefits and contribute to the research through generating new knowledge (Johnston 2014). Being already in the MOIT, the researcher had access to review relevant literatures both in electronic and printed formats from MOIT; MOIT project documents including policies and procedures, reports, and updates have enabled the researcher to extract supplementary information useful for the study. This has provided the researcher with the opportunity to engage and have an initial understanding of the social media phenomena to investigate research questions, setting the scene for the research to evolve at a fast pace, given time constraints. Secondary information was used to gather information on the uses of social media as a public relations tool in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

A substantive amount of information was also collected from the website content and journals. As Dury (2008) argues, secondary data provides a comparative tool for the research. This can help to compare existing data with raw data for purposes of examining differences. However, the limitation of using secondary data is that such information may be collected for purposes different from the current research (Dubois & Gadde 2012).

3.7 Data Analysis

The collected data that were provided by six participants through qualitative interview needs to be analyzed and interpreted to give it meaning. This includes transcribing the verbal interview into text, synthesizing, categorizing and summarizing the coded data, verifying the data is reliable and valid and finally, reporting the results. The transcripts of interviews were read several times, according to what the participants said about their knowledge and experiences concerning uses of social media as a public relations tool in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology. The important points that related to answering the research questions were grouped together and those that carried similar information were grouped differently. The information that was obtained from the interview was then used to formulate the themes that were used in the data analysis chapter. To sum up, a process of thematic analysis was used, in which key themes and sub-themes relevant to the research questions of the study were derived inductively from the interview data. Thematic analysis offers an effective method for analyzing qualitative data (Stirling, A. 2001). These were used to structure the presentation of results from the interviews used to preserve the real-life experiences of the research participants.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles including anonymity, confidentiality and participants consent have been considered before starting the research. All selected participants for the interviews must have been assured that their confidentiality has to be given top priority. They were all informed that their confidentiality could be maintained by keeping their names and quotes anonymous and storing all data they provided in a secure and confidential environment during the study and destroyed later. There were no anticipated risks to the participants as no physical efforts or hazards were involved.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS/ RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings of a qualitative study of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, to explore the use of social media as a public relations tool. Data collection methods consisted of a face to face interviews and a review of social media-related documents (MOIT project documents including policies and procedures, reports, and updates) provided by participants. Purposive sampling was used to generate a sample of Ministry of Innovation and Technology employees. The research participants consisted of a nominated manager, PR practitioners, editor and IT experts. The chapter sets out the findings of the research by key themes and sub-themes relevant to the purpose of the study and the research questions. The themes and sub-themes were derived using an inductive process of thematic analysis of the research data, and have been integrated with the results of the qualitative interviews.

The cumulative time of data recorded from interviews was around 320 minutes, with each interview recording averaging around 45 minutes, and took around 60 to 80 minutes to transcribe the recorded data into text. Although the sample size was relatively small, data saturation was still achieved. Towards the end of the data collection process, the researcher realized data saturation was achieved when no new information was being presented by the participants. Moreover, the researcher noticed that the interviews started following a pattern. With that said, four major themes emerged during the interviews conducted for this study.

The following section discusses these themes individually, from most general to most specific. Each major theme covers a wide range of topics, which are arranged based on the frequency in which they were mentioned during the interviews. Some of these topics include which social media platforms the interviewees used mostly, the purposes or roles they preferred to use this tool, the advantages and disadvantages of using social media, the effectiveness of using social media as PR tool, and to what extent the interviewees used social media effectively.

4.2 KEY FINDINGS

RQ1: Which social media platforms do public relations practitioners of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology use the most?

The six participants were asked which social media platforms they use to communicate with stakeholders and the public as well, and they were asked how often they use these platforms in their role as a Ministry's manager, PR practitioners and IT experts.

The participants provided a response for each social media platform. Most of the participants said that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the three social media platforms they were most comfortable using as a communication tool. Participant D.G and A.K said, "In today's social networking era we only use facebook and Instagram for networking, work, and career purposes. Of course, we also use them for social purposes such as staying in touch with friends and family." They added, "Facebook is a quick and easy way for us to see what our friends are up to and stay up to date. Participant D.A explained," I use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for mainly news and information and for social purposes such as sharing pictures and videos. He added, "Twitter is great for quick clips of news and events. He stated, "When Twitter first came out, I was all about it and used it to update my current status. But now I rarely use it unless I want a quick update on news. It's not convenient for much else."

Participants expressed that they used social media "formally" when connecting with business partners or when they want to catch up on news that interests them. One participant said that, "Twitter is an awesome way to find out information in a short and quick way. I mean most of my information I get about the world comes from Twitter." He also suggested that he goes on Twitter, "to find out information that is important to [participant] and to find out what's going on in the world". Participant Z.W stated, "I really don't use Twitter very much. I love using Instagram and Facebook for both social and news purposes every day. Other than that, I use Facebook almost every day. It's a great way to interact with friends." Participant H.K and T.W suggested, "Social Media platforms are effective tools when we use them in a right way, for disseminating information, receiving news and events, sharing pictures and videos, and interacting with public." However, they constantly use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for their social and career purposes because of the simplicity of access of the tools.

Therefore the study found that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were the platforms mostly used by the participants in Ministry of Innovation and Technology, but it ultimately relied on their purpose. In addition to this, the study distinguished that E-mail, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, and LinkedIn were viewed as the weakest platforms by participants because of the poor quality of link and the inconvenience of using the platforms to find out more about the news.

RQ2: What are the roles of social media in Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology?

A distinct theme that emerged from the interviews was regarding the roles of social media.

Social media can help to build up good PR as it allows the public to engage directly with the organization which will build trust and better relationships among them. The increasing popularity of Social Networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others have contributed to the rapid growth of consumer based medium.

Participant D.A. explained, “The emerging of social media in PR has caused press releases, articles and events to become less effective than before because the audience and their preferred channels of information have changed.” Participant D.G. and A.K. perceived social media have helped them to enhance the source-reporter relationship as they are able to interact with each other without any barriers. With the emerging of social media, it has brought in the “old” and “new” rules of press release into PR practice where the “new” press release will be delivered directly to target publics via the web.

Participant D.A. added, “Social media is an open environment. It allows the users to talk back if they do or do not like what the organization is doing or saying.” Participant H.K. believes that social media encourages two-way symmetrical communication among its users. It has allowed PR practitioners to change their communication way which they will personally reach as well as interact with the publics and stakeholders, and will end up for mutual beneficial relationships. Thus, social media has become the audience “conversational human voice” and this has offered new possibilities for the traditional PR concept of not fully applying the real-time and conversational nature of social media. Participant T.W. and Z.W. agreed social media have changed the setting of the PR in many ways, and the most significant change is the shift from one-way PR communication to a two-way or multi-way communication. The organization now is

communicating via social media platforms which allow them to have one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many communication, and this has transformed the PR practice. This is also highlighted by participant D.A.

The research found that social media has shifted the previous recognized power of ‘word of mouth’ to the power of ‘word of mouse’ which generally diverts the PR practitioners’ attention towards its importance. However, in some instances, the unethical or inappropriate practice of adopting social media sites have resulted to negative consequences that affected the public’s image as well as the organization’s reputations. Therefore, the role of social media will always be primarily the creation of communities and enabling of conversations among their members (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009).

RQ3: To what extent is the Ministry of Innovation and Technology effective in using social media in communicating with their internal and external publics?

To find out whether social media are effective to improve PR, which is one of the concerns of the topic of this study, the researcher asked a related question and the majority responded positively.

One of the objectives of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of social media usage as a tool of PR practitioners. When asked, all participants agreed that social media are cost effective tools, supporting claims by many researchers who argue that social media are the most cost effective communications tool including Haddud, et al, (2016), Buettner (2015), Martin and Bavel (2013). Participants mentioned that the use of social media has improved public service delivery, either by reducing the amount of in-person contact needed, or enabling the organization to respond more quickly to reported problems. All the participants stressed that Social media allows their organization to be responsive in a timely manner. Moreover, they believe that social media reduces in person and phone contact because people have such confidence in what we are putting out on social media. It has reduced the number of people contact. Participant D.A. added that technology helps organizations in terms of cost-effectiveness. “Rather than having two or three employees doing the same job, you can have one with the help of tools and programmes which are available online.” He said we can certainly do with less and that helps in cost-effectiveness.

Participant H.K. said publishing on social media platforms contributes to cost saving. “This will not cost us anything since social media are free to use. So yes, it’s cost-effective”. Participant H.K. added using less paper, the organization can save money. “Today our printing machines are not used unless it is deemed necessary to print as everything could be sent through email, through Telegram. This is really contributing to cost reduction or optimization,” expressed participant D.A. The participants in general indicated that the social media have affected their practices, especially with regard to the dissemination of information to staff, stakeholders and the public. The participants were upbeat that the social media hold great potential in improving the practices of public relations in their organization. More than half said that the social media have made public relations notice boards irrelevant. Participant D.A. and H.K. said they use the social media (blog and Facebook) to share their press releases with the media.

In the words of participant D.A; “What I do is to simply share my press releases and the accompanying photographs in our official blogspot and promote them with Facebook and Twitter instead of placing photographs on notice boards, I share them on flicker or Instagram. It saves me the time of sending individual mails to journalists.” Participant Z.W. said “Regarding notice boards, people don’t have time to visit notice boards again, majority of our staffs’ source information through the social media that is where we met them”. As a result, I can say: “Social media is an effective time management medium of communication both for business as well as for academic purposes. One can post a message or browse for any information at the click of a button. This is an added advantage in comparison to print and other electronic media like television and radio, though one can get the updates in television, yet social media channels provide impromptu information and connection with the people that matters most.

On the contrary participant D.G. and A.K. complained that the social media have taken much of their personal time that they can hardly differentiate their working hours from their personal time. “With my Smartphone, there is no closing time for me” said respondent D.G. “Interacting on facebook serves as my way of relaxing after the day’s work. Though it denies me my leisure time” said respondent A.K. One participant believes that, “The effectiveness of a tool highly depends on the growth of followers/likes/shares of specific sites. Of course, assessment measurements are very difficult to create because social media effectiveness is hard to measure.” The study found that what the participants said is in agreement with Rudloff and Frey (2010:92-

95) stated that a social media channel is a cost effective, simple and fast way to communicate with customers and stakeholders.

Moreover, Langer (2014:12) revealed that social media could be effective when dealing with internal and external stakeholder relations outside of work, through increased interaction of communication between the organization and clients. In a later online word-of-mouth survey by Sorensen (2010:71-72) in Denmark, it was suggested that social network sites have changed the trend of communication from traditional (billboard advertisements, newspapers and television advertising) to online advertising, using social network sites, which could reach a larger audience faster, with enhanced communication between individuals and other groups of people; the communication is bi-directional between consumers and organizations who could engage with their audience faster through the channel.

The reviewed literature indicated that social media platforms were effective, with the adoption of the platforms as a new communication strategy. This was done because of the two-way communication pattern social media could offer that allowed for response from the stakeholders, and increased interaction between internal and external stakeholders.

RQ4: To what extent the Ministry of Innovation and Technology uses the social media?

The other distinct emerged theme in their responses was that social media is an effective communication tool. The participants generally agreed that social media is expected to be used on a daily basis during social interactions. It is embedded into many electronic products, including traditional communication technologies such as mobile phones. Using social media has transformed our perception of communication. It has become the new standard when it comes to social interactions. One participant described the integration of social media in our daily lives by stating that this form of communication, "...is kind of the status quo, it is what we do, it is what everyone does, and you do what everyone else does."

Participants of this study also agreed that social media is a convenient method of communicating and sharing life events with loved ones. Most people are members of at least one social networking site, which allows them to stay connected on a global scale. It allows them to share their thoughts with the rest of the world and most importantly with those they are close to. "It

seems like almost everyone has an account somewhere so it is good to get on there and connect with people.” Social media allow the users to anonymously and frequently find information communicated by others. Many of the participants mentioned that they use social media to check on the status of their friends and family. This tool is especially useful when participants would like to check on people that they don’t regularly interact with on a personal level.

One participant expressed the need to check social media regularly after sharing a story about a friend, who announced her engagement on Facebook: “I need to check Facebook all the time now, apparently this is how people post their life events and I seem to be missing out on knowing these events because I don’t go on Facebook.” Moreover, participants agreed that they tend to turn to social networking sites as a resource in times of need. For instance, when considering a scenario where people lose their phones, a few participants stated that they would “go to Twitter or Facebook, to get someone’s number”. It has become commonplace to resort to social networking sites when one needs to reach out to others. These sites serve as a modern age address book - they hold phone numbers, email addresses, pictures, recent personalized news, and more. In addition, these sites are accessible through various mediums. Losing one’s phone no longer disables them from communicating with others, because they can access social networking sites on many other devices such as computers, tablets, as well as other people’s devices.

In general participants stated that although social media are expected to be used on a daily basis during social interactions, they do not use them regularly in their organization because of the restrictions that exists in their organization. They use social media platforms moderately effectively; however, restrictions exist. Some participants noticed that “In today’s social networking era we are not allowed to use social media in a daily basis for networking, work, and career purposes.” One participant stated that. “In the government ministry, we have to be very careful with confidentiality and regulatory issues in what we do.” Another participant expressed that, “The government ministry is highly regulated on what you can post.” The other participant added that in government ministry, “There are so many different compliance issues. People do not want all that information public. There is a sense of security there that you do not want to see everything out in the open.”

From this the study found that social media helps people communicate freely without considering the geographical factor, and social media helps to facilitate people to stay connected with others by just clicking a few buttons and the message will be sent in the shortest period of time. This is in agreement with Wright, Kahanfar, Harrington, and Kizer (2010:78), revealed that social media minimizes and removes the time and location restriction. Besides this, social media is to be used as a strategic communication to obtain the internal and external information regarding the organization. “The communications world is dramatically moving in a digital direction and those who know this transformation will communicate much more effectively than those who do not.”

Findings from Document Review

The researcher reviewed the ICT project document and ICT policy and found the following findings:

- Absence of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks.
- Limitations in telecommunications infrastructure and low degree of internet services penetration.
- Lack of organized information and data resources, and poor accessibility to those that exist.
- Lack of skilled human resources coupled with low ICT literacy.
- Underdeveloped private sector.

In order to address these, the government has recognized the importance of Information and Communication Technology development. The ICT policy covers knowledge and information as a tool for development & ICT as a sector or industry. There is strong belief and commitment that apart from being as enabler of socio-economic development, ICT also supports the country’s ongoing process of democratization and good governance. The researcher reviewed the Ministry’s website content and found that the government Ministry, which has a presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, presented inactive account. It means that it does not post tweets in a daily basis. Because of this, Ethiopia ranked very low in the IDI. The function of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is generally misunderstood in the ministry of Innovation and Technology. The Ministry was not encouraging citizens to participate in a two-way conversation. The researcher has found nobody who is in charge of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents discussion and conclusion of the findings correlated to the topic: the use of social media as a public relations tool, taking into account the goal and objectives of the study. The chapter ends with recommendations based on the findings as a contribution to solve the problem investigated.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The study discovered that the social media have redefined the practices of public relations in the Ministry. Notice boards that were one of the traditional channels of disseminating information to the internal publics of the Ministry have been replaced with Facebook and Instagram which are the preferred channels for staffs. The ministry PR manager no longer waits for the traditional media to publish his press releases; he provides updates on activities using blogs, facebook and twitter platforms. The study further discovered that all the public relations practitioners in the ministry use the social media for their professional practices. This is in agreement with the findings of Achor, et al (2015).

Although the extent of their uses varies depending on skill and the disposition of individual practitioners, it is commendable that PR practitioners are flowing with trends in information dissemination. Staffs, who constitute the bulk of internal public of the ministry, are social media users. It is necessary that PR practitioners should engage them in their favorite channels. The findings of the research also revealed that social media use by PR practitioners in the ministry have not significantly affected their personal lifestyle. This implies that many of the managers fall under the social media personality category described by Odii (2013) as “Dippers”. According to Odii, “Dippers” access their social media pages infrequently, often in days or weeks without posting updates and they are not addicted to the social media. This attitude towards the social media has created information gaps which are exploited by rumor mongers to spread malicious information against many organizations.

Results showed that the Ministry of Innovation and Technology is doing efforts in informing about its services especially through Facebook. The aim of using social media channels for the Innovation and Technology Ministry with a presence in social media was basically for facilitating flow of information. On the other hand, Twitter and Instagram were poorly used by the Ministry and it was not employed in its full capacity in order to facilitate conversations.

There were more superficial topics than in-depth topics in the Facebook posts and tweets. Social media was not employed for communicating important Ministry's messages, such as corporate news, annual reports, and corporate social responsibility, among others. Moreover, social media platforms were not either used to provide feedback or to promote conversations with stakeholders. Additionally, the Ministry was not tweeting or posting on Facebook daily. When hosting social media sites, it is important to tweet or post at least once a day; the Ministry should understand that creating a presence in social media sites requires time, hard work, and attention for maintaining the social presence (Sweetser, 2010). Little feedback was presented by the Ministry (in both Facebook and Twitter accounts). The Ministry was not encouraging citizens to participate in a two-way conversation. Consumers, for example, are a powerful stakeholder group for creating real dialogues through social media sites. "In particular, the power of consumer word-of-mouth has been greatly magnified given the popularity and vast reach of Internet communication media such as blogs, chat rooms, and social media sites" (Du et al, 2010: 14).

The function of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is generally misunderstood in the ministry of Innovation and Technology. It looks that only spreading information and answering general questions was enough. Social media platforms are created for collaboration, participation, learning, sharing, and it is conceived as a two-way communication process. Then, if a government Ministry decides to open a Facebook, Instagram or Twitter account, it is expected (following the meaning of social media and web 2.0 platforms) that the organization should actively engage and contribute to the conversations. For Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are viewed as another media channels, rule by one-way asymmetrical communication. This vision is woefully inadequate because through social media, Ministry can have conversations and exchange ideas and opinions with a variety of publics, including, customers, fans, employees, potential employees, suppliers, journalists, academia, etc.

Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are places to build relationships with stakeholders and have personal and meaningful dialogues with them (Sweetser, 2010).

The government Ministry, which has a presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, presented inactive account. It means that it was not posting tweets a week ago from the time of the analysis. Waters, Burnett, Lamm& Luce (2009) concluded that “organizations create a profile and then abandon it; they will create only minimal exposure for the organization, and it could turn off potential supporters if they witness inactivity on the site.” Therefore, having an inactive Facebook, Instagram or Twitter account seems as a larger disadvantage than having no presence in social media sites at all, it is like a double edge sword. “By avoiding the place where the conversation is happening, the ministry is missing the opportunity to be heard and understood” (Burson-Marsteller, 2010: 2).

On the other hand, who is in charge of these Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts? The PR department? Or the IT experts? there was no “human voice” in these discussions. These conversations should be interactive, have a human approach, and embrace more openness. Sweetser (2010) suggests that one way of having positive impacts on the relationships between organizations and publics, is to communicate in a human voice and taking advantage of most multimedia available. The few replies to posts did not show who is representing the Ministry. In a social networking environment, allowing who is tweeting on behalf of the Ministry is important because there is no longer some faceless department but an actual person (Rybalko& Seltzer, 2010).

Findings suggest that public relations or communications practitioners should be in charge of the social media sites. Public relations practitioners possess “know-how” in handling and employing social media tools for a two-way symmetrical model of public relations practice (Rybalko& Seltzer, 2010). They should not only monitor the Facebook, Instagram and Twitter sphere for mentions of the organizations, but also they ought to check blogs, groups, or other social media presence. Having a presence in the social media world requires planning, preparation, training, and monitoring. It is more than just opening a Facebook account and leave it to the hands of interns or secretaries. “Government Ministries must monitor their own social media presence to

ensure a consistent brand message and to measure the use of their social media engagement” (Burson-Masteller, 2010: 2).

As social media sites become widely used by Ministry of Innovation and Technology, organizations should understand the foundations of social media and why it is important to update online strategies and build relationships with publics in a daily basis.

The following critical success factors can be identified from analysis of the overall findings of this study:

1. The allocation of sufficient organizational resources to the social media program, especially staff resources and adequate time to develop the program and to monitor and manage social media on a daily basis.
2. Ensuring that all employees with responsibilities and involvement in social media are adequately trained and have the right skills and expertise. These include the technical and quantitative skills involved in establishing social media platforms, identifying suitable metrics and measurement systems and monitoring and reporting on impacts. Equally, they include the more qualitative skills involved in using social media in creative and personal ways to interact with citizens and develop trust based relationships.
3. Establishing effective and efficient social media management across the organization, which involves appropriate levels of integration and co-ordination of departmental social media activities.
4. Establishing suitable social media monitoring and measurement systems that enable the organization to determine uses on key indicators such as openness and public engagement.
5. A commitment to and the ability to utilize performance measurement data to continually improve the social media strategy and program.
6. Utilizing a range of social media channels and tools, with each selected for its best fit to the intended purpose and audience, and with linkages between them.
7. The use of comprehensive and clear guidance to all social media users, which might consist of a formal social media policy or more general guidelines.
8. An approach to social media which views this as one component of a wider approach to organizational transparency and public engagement, and which includes other methods and tools targeted to the needs of the organization and its public.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work was to explore and evaluate the use of social media as a public relations tool at Ethiopian ministry of Innovation and Technology. Qualitative research method was used. Six participants were interviewed through personal contacts and telephone interview, and the interviews were then transcribed. Finally, thematic analysis was used to analyze the findings.

The study concluded that social media is dramatically changing the way PR is practiced. Social media has accelerated and intensified the way public relations practitioners communicate, relate, their attitudes and tools/methods of practice. Social media have given them dynamic new ways to communicate with many internal and external audiences. This is associated with the theory of technological Determinism conducted by Marshall McLuhan (2012), who states that we are living in a new age of technology that has never been experienced before. Social media have made the practice more challenging for PR professionals because it requires a diverse and ever-expanding collection of skills and proficiency especially with the rise of new social media technologies every day. There is increased knowledge that social media has forced PR professionals to have.

The study discovered that notice boards that were one of the traditional channels of disseminating information to the internal publics of the MCIT have been replaced with Facebook, Twitter and Instagram which are the preferred channels for the staff. The Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology PR manager no longer waits for the traditional media to publish his press releases; he provides updates on activities using Blogs, Facebook and Twitter platforms. The social media has tremendously enhanced the performance of PR in the organization. It offers a low-cost relationship building; it has changed the way an organization, mainly a PR organization communicates with its target audience.

This is according to Wright and Hinson (2008a, 2009b) have found that most public relations professionals believe that the use of social media has had a positive impact on public relations. They have also found that about 85 percent of public relations professionals believe that these new tools and traditional media complement each other rather than compete (Wright & Hinson, 2009b).The government ministry uses social media for different purposes in order to achieve

corporate goals or objectives. But thanks to the underlying interactivity of social media, it is a tremendous resource for enhancing corporate communication and stakeholder engagement. Results showed that the improved communication platforms that social media provides were not employed to reach different stakeholders. Social media has not been conceived yet as a strategic tool for corporate communication in Ministry of Innovation and Technology. The Ministry failed to create and promote effective communication processes that can lead to fruitful discussions and relationships with different publics.

There is a large difference in having a Facebook, Instagram or Twitter account and having a well-planned managed social media presence. Presently, this is the case of Innovation and Technology Ministry; it is more concern just holding a Facebook, Instagram or Twitter account that counting with excellent managerial people behind it. This study suggests that Innovation and Technology Ministry needs to count with social media professionals that can promote engagement in every step of the online activity.

Although there are some limitations in this research, these restrictions present avenues for future investigations. Future research could analyze the same sample for a longer period of time and include other social media sites for in-depth analysis. Further studies also could center in how stakeholders evaluate the performance of Ministry of Innovation and Technology in the social media world. In the late 1990's when companies decided to create corporate websites, it was expected that they would be open for communicating with stakeholders, but they only centered in "pushing mundane advertising messages" (Lee, et al, 2006). More than 10 years have passed and now with the presence of social media in our lives, Ministry of Innovation and Technology is not promoting openness through this emergent media. Organizations should embrace correctly social media if they want to remain competitive in the market. Social media is here to stay and let stakeholders have a voice and become active citizens.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The aforementioned limitations of this study also present an opportunity for further research, as recommended below.

- ❖ Further research should be done to fully understand the positive and negative impact of using social media platforms as a PR tool in the government agency/ministry.
- ❖ There is still no clear research on defining or measuring social media success in the government Ministry. Therefore, to determine their effectiveness future research is needed.
- ❖ Since social media platforms are dynamic and powerful communication tools, the government Ministry must have the 'social media implementation guide' in order to evaluate effectiveness and make improvements.
- ❖ The PR practitioners should be in charge of social media sites and access their social media pages frequently and tweet or post updates in order not to create information gaps for the rumor mongers to spread malicious information against their organization.
- ❖ The Ministry should fully understand the function of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter not only to spread information and to answer general questions but also to create for collaboration, participation, learning, sharing and to contribute to the conversation.

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APPENDIX

THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background Questions

1. What is your educational & professional background?
2. How do the social media enhance or improve public relations at the MOIT?
3. How does the emergence of social media change how MOIT communicate?
4. Which departments of your organization are currently using social media?
5. How do you compare any message on a social media site such as YouTube, Face-book or Twitter to that on traditional media such as, TV, radio or newspaper?
6. *What are the social media tools that your organization currently uses?*
7. *How do social media become a PR tool?What factors influence this phenomenon?*
8. *What types of PR tasks do social media perform?*
9. Which social media platforms do you use most?
10. How do you evaluate the use of social media in MOIT?
11. What are your favorite social media platforms and why?
12. What do you use Facebook for? Twitter? Instagram?