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Addis Ababa University, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism
and Communication,

The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War

By: Berihun Mekonnen Ali

Advisor: Abdulaziz Dino Gidreta (Ph.D.)

For the partial fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Public Relations and
Strategic Communications, School of Journalism and Communications.

November 2023

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**Addis Ababa University, School of Journalism and Communication, Department of Public
Relations and Strategic Communication**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Berihun Mekonnen entitled — *The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War*, is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts Degree in Public Relations and Strategic Communication, complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Advisor	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Examiner	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Examiner	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this study, titled, “*The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War,*” is my original work and has not been presented in any universities, and that all the sources of materials used for the study have been dully acknowledged.

Declared by: Berihun Mekonnen Ali

Signature: _____

Date: November 2023

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

In my view, the work is an original effort of the candidate and all materials used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged.

Advisor Name: Abdulaziz Dino Giderta (Ph.D.)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	viii
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background of the Study.....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3. Objective of the Study.....	7
1.4. Research Questions.....	7
1.5. Significance of the Study.....	8
1.6. Scope of the Study.....	9
1.7. Limitation of the Study.....	10
1.8. Organization of the Study.....	11
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
2.1. Crisis communication overview.....	13
2.2. Crisis Communication Theories.....	20
2.2.1 The Image Restoration Theory (IRT).....	21
2.2.2 The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).....	24
2.2.3 Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Theory (SMCCT).....	26
2.3. Social Media.....	29
2.4. Social Media and Crisis Communication.....	31
2.5. Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	34
2.6. Review of Empirical Studies.....	36
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	39
3.1. Research Design.....	39
3.2. Research Approach.....	39
3.3. Data Collection Methods.....	41
3.4. Data Analysis Methods.....	44
3.5. Description of the Study Area.....	45
CHAPTER 4 - DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	46
4.1. Demographic Analysis.....	46
4.1.1. Age, Sex, Education and Employment of Respondents.....	46
4.1.2. Preferred Social Media Platforms.....	49
4.1.3. Preferred Social Media Contents.....	52
4.1.4. Time Spent on Social Media.....	53

4.2. Utilization of Social Media	55
4.2.1. Public Information Sources.....	55
4.2.2. Government Social Media Outlets.....	57
4.1.1. Social Media Complements Other Government Communications	59
4.2. Effectiveness Of Government Social Media Communication	61
4.2.1. Timeliness and Reliability of Information	61
4.2.2. Appropriate Strategy and Plan.....	69
4.2.3. Clear and Concise Message	71
4.2.4. Two-Way Communication	73
4.3. Change in Public Perception	75
4.3.1. Influence Public Behaviour and Action	75
4.3.2. Inspire Confidence and Trust	78
4.3.3. Public Support.....	80
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	86
5.1. Conclusions	86
5.2. Recommendations	87
References.....	90
Annex 1- Survey Questions	94
Annex 2- Survey Responses.....	101
Annex 3 - Key Informant Interview Questions	101

Abstract

The Tigray war in Ethiopia has highlighted the multifaceted role of social media in crisis communication. While the Ethiopian government has leveraged social media platforms to disseminate its narrative on the cause of the conflict, updates on military operations, counter opposition narratives, and refute international media coverage, concerns regarding the accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of government-shared information have been prevalent. This study employed a descriptive research methodology, incorporating mixed data collection techniques, to comprehensively address the research questions. The combination of surveys and key informant interviews provided both qualitative insights and quantitative support for the study's findings. The study assessed and validated the role social media play in government's crisis communication underscoring despite the absence of a clear crisis communication strategy and active public engagement, the government's crisis communication appears to have garnered it the much-needed popular support, potentially influencing the war's trajectory. Furthermore, social media's role extended beyond mere communication, evolving into a tool for disseminating propaganda, suppressing dissent, harassing critics, and exacerbating ethnic tensions.

Key Words: Crisis Communication, Social Media, Tigray Conflict, Government Communication

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Ethiopia, home of more than 120 million people, has been in a destructive, brutal civil war between forces loyal to the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) along with its regional allies, the Amhara and Afar Special Forces and militias among others. The conflict started in November 2020, when the Federal Ethiopian government launched a military campaign against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had been in power in the region for many years. The government accused the TPLF of attacking a federal military base and attempting to destabilize the country. The two years' conflict from November 2020 - November 2022, has left thousands [if not hundreds of thousands] killed and millions displaced from their homes; the nation's economy battered, and the country's infrastructure devastated. Reports of widespread gross human rights violations including summary execution of civilians, rape, and looting created stains in the social fabric of communities and left the nation divided (EHRC 2022). `

One of the most intriguing incidents about the Tigray crisis is how social media turned into a battlefield. On November 3, 2020, the Tigray Special Forces and forces loyal to the TPLF attacked the Northern Command of the ENDF. The next day Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared that "a red line had been crossed and that a law enforcement operation to detain TPLF leadership was in progress" using social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Afterwards, Tigrayan activists and their followers on one side and the Ethiopian government and its supporters on the other attempted to provide their account of the causes of the conflict and what happened on the battlefields. While TPLF supporters and affiliates concentrated primarily on

spreading accusations of gross violence and genocide claims by Ethiopian forces and their Eritrean allies, the Ethiopian government worked to refute its adversary's accusations and provide “alternative facts”. At the start of the conflict with biased diplomatic and media support from the west, the TPLF supporters seem to have an upper ground in this information war. Later, the government also exerted extra effort and seemed to be on par with its opponents.

Social media has affected people's life more and more in recent years. The majority of people in the world have accounts on one or more social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter. Companies, different organizations, and institutions including government offices and officials have a social media presence on one or more of the social media platforms available on the Internet due to the growing relevance of social media (W. T. Coombs, Ongoing Crisis Communications 2014).

The practice of using social media platforms for disseminating information at times of crises to send cautions, to create situational awareness, and even to facilitate action and conduct dialogues and feedback loops among public authorities, volunteer groups, the business sector, and citizens are growing as communication technology diversifies and multiplies. Government communications mainly used were limited to mainstream media channels, leaflets, and press contacts. Now with the introduction of social media channels, government officials have become communication machines in disseminating information to the public. The cyberspace or the Internet is used for twenty-four hours and seven days collaborative communications with the public that include citizens of the nation, the media, and other relevant stakeholders. The latest addition to the variety of digital communication channels is social media such as Twitter and Facebook enabling government organizations to build new communication networks for interacting with citizens and stakeholders (Wendling, Radisch and Jacobzone 2013).

Government communication is a vital management function that enables coherent messaging both for its public within the administration and externally and serves as a key tool for effective policy design and implementation. To effectively establish and implement policies, public communication is a crucial government activity that provides consistent internal and public messages.

Governments engage in crisis communication in the wake of unanticipated incidents that could damage their reputation or put citizens in danger. The timely and beneficial transmission of important information to the public during a crisis, such as the Tigray conflict in the case of Ethiopia, depends on effective communication. During a crisis, timely and helpful dissemination of crucial information to the public is dependent on an efficient communication plan and its can be done in varied ways, including briefing to the media houses, disseminating press releases, and conducting press conferences and campaigning for information dissemination about the crisis situation as well as the measures taken, clarifying the government's crisis plan and response activities to citizens. But recently the use of social media for crisis communication has become an important element in public relations spheres.

Communication during crises must be precise, succinct, and consistent. Political communication as a whole has elements of crisis communication, but there are also significant differences. Political figures, parties, and governments are expected to respond in a timely, sympathetic, and reliable manner during times of crisis. The general population wants to know what is happening, what the political elites are doing to address the issue, and what they should be doing. By its very nature, a crisis is full of unknowns and uncertainties, which causes people to feel scared, anxious, and angry—most of all about what might happen. Because of this, excellent crisis communication can be a strategic asset that helps the crisis response to be successful.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for crisis communication, particularly in the context of armed conflicts. The Tigray War in Ethiopia, which erupted in November 2020, has been a stark example of how social media can be used to shape narratives, mobilize support, and spread disinformation. This study aims to investigate the role of social media in crisis communication during the Tigray War, focusing on the Ethiopian government's use of these platforms to manage the crisis.

This study will examine the government's overall social media strategy during the crisis, including the types of content shared, the impact of the government's social media messaging on public perceptions of the conflict and the government's response, the prevalence and impact of misinformation and disinformation on social media related to the Tigray War as well as the role of social media in mobilizing support for the government and in shaping the narrative of the conflict and the implications of social media use for crisis communication in Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The practice of public relations and communications is going through a significant transition due to the advent of new interactive communication channels called social media (Campbell 2012). The use of social media has grown significantly over the past decade as a means of communication and is now playing a larger role in people's daily lives. Not only do people spend a lot of time on social media every day, 147 minutes on average (Statista 2022), but they also now expect to learn about breaking news from social media first, making them a vital channel for delivering real-time urgent news and emergency notifications (Ho and Michalak 2017). Social media platforms have grown to be important information sources, and their increased use for crisis communications is thought to affect societal communication and debate (Neill and Lee 2016).

In Ethiopia too, social media has become an important communication platform not only to the wider public but also to the government communication including crisis communications.

Due to blockade of access for reporters and any neutral observers such as diplomats, to the conflict areas, the public and international community that observes the Ethiopian affairs depend on information sourced from the belligerent parties and their supporters to understand and figure out what is going on the battle ground. Social media platforms particularly Facebook and Twitter were widely used by both parties, their supporters, and affiliates to blame and counter-blame the causes and misdeeds in the conflict as well as to disseminate information, to counter inform and misinform the battlefield outcomes of the war. Ethiopia has a troubled past with information politics. The EPRDF restricted free speech for the majority of its three decades of rule and established a strong infrastructure for censorship and surveillance to stifle political dissent (Freitas-Tamura 2017).

Being a relatively new phenomenon, the connection between social media and crisis communication has not yet been thoroughly studied, and there are no theories that are explicitly geared toward the role of social media in crisis communications. In addition to that though there is a wealth of theories on crisis communication in general there is little research on the role of social media in crisis communication. Some research works such as “The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication and Crisis Management” (Civelek, Çemberci and Eralp 2016), The Use of Social Media in Risk and Crisis Communication (Wendling, Radisch and Jacobzone 2013), Using Twitter for crisis communications in a natural disaster: Hurricane Harvey (Vera-Burgos and Padgett 2020), Social media interactions between government and the public: A Chinese case study of government WeChat official accounts on information related to COVID-19 (Shao, et al. 2022) all discuss how social media are used on crisis communication by governments and

their officials. The (Wendling, Radisch and Jacobzone 2013) and (Civelek, Çemberci and Eralp 2016) generally discuss the importance of the ever-growing social media in crisis communications. The (Vera-Burgos and Padgett 2020) study looks at how social media, particularly Twitter, is used in crisis communications during a natural catastrophe and how it can inform, direct, reassure, and give victims hope while also keeping people around the country and the world informed so they can offer support as needed. The usage of Twitter by Houston, Texas, Mayor Sylvester Turner during Hurricane Harvey in August, and September 2017 is examined in a case study. (Shao, et al. 2022) on the other hand, study highlight how the Chinese government has used WeChat, regarded as an efficient instant messaging tool during COVID-19, and also this could be helpful to disseminate information and avail support and services. All these studies though highlight the importance of social media in crisis communication none talk about how a government uses social media in crisis communications on the scale of national crises such as the Tigray all-out civil war.

This research examines the Ethiopian government's social media crisis communication during the Tigray war to understand its effectiveness in managing public perception and influencing behavior by examining the extent to which government messages resonated with the public, influenced their perceptions of the conflict, and shaped their behavior. This would encompass assessing the accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of government messaging, gauging its impact on public attitudes, and examining the utilization of various social media platforms for crisis communication. By delving into these aspects, we can gain insights into the government's strategic approach to navigating the Tigray conflict's complex information landscape.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to investigate the role social media played in crisis communications of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray war.

Specific Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To evaluate the accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of Ethiopian government's social media crisis communication during the Tigray war
2. To assess the impact of social media crisis communication of the government of Ethiopia on public perception, attitudes, and behavior during the Tigray war
3. To examine the utilization of social media platforms by the government of Ethiopia during the Tigray war for crisis communication.

1.4. Research Questions

This study presumes that the government of Ethiopia has used social media as one of its communications platforms during the Tigray crisis and this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How effective was the Ethiopian government's social media communication to disseminate accurate, reliable and timely information during the Tigray War?

RQ2: How did government social media crisis communication during the Tigray War impact public perception and behavior?

RQ3: How did the Ethiopian government utilize social media for crisis communication during the Tigray War?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This research assesses and evaluates the role of social media in crisis communication and how effective government communications were during the Tigray crisis gauging the perception of the public. It assesses the role of social media plays in PR practices of crisis communications and provide specifics of strategies and tactics the government of Ethiopia used in employing social media for crisis communications and their impact on informing the public and the international community. Previous studies conducted on social media in crisis communication focused on describing the specifics of how strategies and policies work rather than the role social media play and are specific to local business institutions and organizations (Hyland-Wood, et al. 2021).

The role of social media in crisis communication is imperative because social media platforms have become one of the most important that modern societies communicate today. In times of crisis, social media can be used to disseminate important information quickly to a large audience. This can help first responders and emergency services to distribute vital information to the public, such as emergency contact phone numbers, evacuation routes or shelter locations. Furthermore, social media can be used to keep the public updated on the progress of a crisis, minimizing the negative impact of rumours and misinformation. This is especially important in terms of crisis response, as accurate and timely information is crucial for effective coordination among emergency personnel. Lastly, social media platforms can also be utilized for providing emotional support in the wake of a crisis. In case of a natural disaster or any other crisis, people may need to express their feelings or find comfort from others who are going through the same experience. Social media can offer a space for people to do just that. Thus, the research on the role of social media in crisis communication can potentially develop practical and effective

measures to harness the power of social media to aid in the mitigation, response, and recovery efforts of diverse crises situations.

This research adds to the field focusing on the role social media played in crisis communication of a civil war, a larger scale national crisis, and how the government used social media in crisis communications. The study also provides valuable insights into how governments can utilize these platforms to manage crises and maintain public trust. It sheds light on effective strategies, such as frequent updates, public engagement, and multimedia content, while also highlighting the challenges of navigating misinformation and disinformation. The study's findings can inform government communication strategies and contribute to more effective crisis response efforts.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study is scoped to see the role social media played in the government of Ethiopia's crisis communication assess the communication strategies and specific activities done using social media to communicate events related to the Tigray crisis. It only covers from November 2020 when the war broke out to November 2022 when a peace accord between the forces is signed in Pretoria, South Africa.

Besides, this study focuses on data collected through surveys and KII from limited sample size to see the type of social media platform people used to get information on the Tigray war and the role social media play in government's communications in providing information for the public. As the crisis was huge in its scale and dimension, the mainstream media (TV, radio, Newspapers, etc.), including the international media have played an important role. But the study is limited only to the role of social media in government's crisis communication.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

The following are some limitations of a study on the public perception of the Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War:

The Tigray War is a complex and sensitive issue. Public perceptions of the war may be influenced by a variety of factors, including political affiliation, personal experiences, and access to information. It may be difficult to disentangle the impact of the Ethiopian government's social media use from other factors that may have influenced public perceptions of the war.

The study may not be representative of the entire Ethiopian public. As the study is limited demographic group and area, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to the entire Ethiopian public. The selection of participants and the methods used to collect data may introduce bias into the study. As the study only included participants who are active on social media, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to the entire Ethiopian public.

Public perceptions of complex issues such as the Tigray War can be difficult to measure and interpret. The study may not be able to definitively identify the impact of the Ethiopian government's use of social media on public perceptions of the Tigray War.

As the study is limited in scope it may only focus on a specific aspect of the Ethiopian government's use of social media, such as the types of content it shared or the frequency of its communications. As a result, the study may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the public perception of the Ethiopian government's use of social media during the Tigray War.

1.8. Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter one, the introduction section provides an overview of the research topic, states the research objective and questions, outlines the significance, scope and limitation of the study. The introduction provides an overview of the topic under investigation, situating it within the broader context of existing knowledge and research. It also provides a roadmap for the structure of the paper, giving readers a sense of how the research is presented and organized.

Chapter two, the literature review section of the thesis highlights the existing literature and research related to the topic, reviews key theories, concepts, and findings that provide context for the present study. It provides a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge and understanding of the topic, identifying key themes, theories, and gaps in the literature. It also provides empirical evidence related with the topic.

Chapter three and four cover the methodology used in the research and data presentation, analysis and discussions respectively. Chapter three outlines the study's research design, research approach, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used in the research. Chapter four synthesizes the study's findings, providing a comprehensive overview of its key takeaways. This includes examining the Ethiopian government's social media strategies, their effectiveness in disseminating information, the impact on public perception. Additionally, discussions delve deeper into the meaning and significance of the findings, interpreting patterns observed, drawing connections between findings, and considering broader implications for crisis communication practices. The findings of the research both from the survey and KII are presented and

triangulated by relevant figures, statistics and interpreted the results, linking them to the existing literature and research objectives.

And finally, the conclusions and recommendations section summarize the key findings of the study and offer suggestions/recommendations for future research or action.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Crisis Communication: Overview

Crisis communication is simply the process of communicating with the different stakeholders when a crisis or emergency happens. It involves the timely and accurate dissemination of information to minimize harm, restore trust, and maintain the reputation of an organization or individual (Austin and Jin 2018). Charles Hermann developed one of the first and most well-known theories of crisis communications model in 1963. Hermann defines a crisis as an incident that is "unexpected or unanticipated by the organization" that threatens the "high-priority values of an organization or institution" with a "limited window of opportunity for a reaction." As a result, three critical characteristics set crises apart from other undesirable situations: a predicament must have come as a surprise, threaten a high amount of harm to the business, and require immediate intervention (Hermann 1963).

Herman identified three stages of crisis communication: 1) Pre-crisis stage: This stage involves preparing for a potential crisis by developing a crisis communication plan, identifying potential crises, and training key personnel to respond effectively. 2) Crisis stage: This stage involves responding to the crisis by providing accurate and consistent information to stakeholders, managing the flow of information, and making decisions to address the crisis. 3). Post-crisis stage: This stage involves evaluating the effectiveness of the crisis response, addressing any lingering issues or concerns, and implementing changes to prevent similar crises from occurring in the future. Herman also emphasized the importance of maintaining credibility during a crisis by being transparent, honest, and proactive in communicating with stakeholders. He argued that

effective crisis communication is an ideal tool to rebuild trust in an organization and alleviate the destructive effect of a crisis.

The Grunig's theory of Crisis Communication is a widely recognized model for understanding how organizations should communicate during times of crisis. This theory was developed by James E. Grunig and his colleagues in the 1990s (W. Coombs, Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. 2007). According to Grunig's theory, there are four stages of crisis communication:

Pre-crisis: In the pre-crisis stage, organizations need to forecast possible crises situation and prepare their crisis communication strategy. This involves identifying potential crises, developing strategies for addressing them, and establishing communication channels.

Crisis response: This stage involves the actual response to the crisis. Organizations should communicate quickly and openly, provide accurate information, and take responsibility for their actions.

Reputation management: After the crisis has been contained, organizations should work to repair any damage to their reputation. This involves ongoing communication with stakeholders, demonstrating accountability, and implementing changes to prevent similar crises from happening in the future.

Learning: In the final stage, organizations should reflect on the crisis and use it as an opportunity to learn and improve their crisis communication strategies. This involves evaluating the effectiveness of their crisis communication plan, identifying areas for improvement, and making necessary changes.

Overall, Grunig's theory emphasizes the importance of proactive crisis communication planning, transparency, and accountability in effectively managing crises and maintaining stakeholder trust.

Dr. Timothy Coombs is a renowned expert in the field of crisis communication and his 2007 book, "Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis," provides a comprehensive definition and theory of crisis communication (W. Coombs, Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. 2007). According to Coombs, crisis communication is "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation." Crisis communication is a complex and dynamic process that involves a range of communication activities, including risk assessment, message development, stakeholder engagement, and media relations. Coombs' theory of crisis communication is based on the idea that crises are complex and uncertain events that require organizations to respond quickly and effectively in order to protect their reputation and maintain stakeholder support. The theory is based on three key principles (W. Coombs, Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. 2007):

- 1) Crisis management is a process, not an event: Crisis management is an ongoing process that involves a series of interconnected activities, such as risk assessment, planning, and training. Organizations that are better prepared for crises are more likely to respond effectively and minimize damage to their reputation.
- 2) Crisis communication is a strategic process: Crisis communication requires a strategic approach that is based on a clear understanding of the organization's goals and objectives, as

well as the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Effective crisis communication involves developing and delivering messages that are timely, accurate, and appropriate for the situation.

- 3) Communication is central to crisis management: Communication is a critical component of crisis management, as it enables organizations to manage risk, build relationships with stakeholders, and maintain their reputation. Effective crisis communication requires a focus on transparency, honesty, and empathy, as well as the ability to respond quickly and effectively to changing circumstances.

Overall, Coombs' theory of crisis communication emphasizes the importance of a strategic and proactive approach to crisis management, and the critical role that communication plays in maintaining organizational reputation and stakeholder support.

Other definitions include:

- According to the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), crisis communication is "the process of anticipating and responding to a crisis or critical event that has or may have an impact on an organization, its stakeholders, or the general public.
- PRSA, the Public Relations Society of America definition of crisis communication says that crises communication is the process by which an entity or organization reacts with a major event that clouds to damage its reputation, stakeholders' interest, or the general public.
- The National Communication Association (NCA) describes crisis communication as the strategic communication efforts an entity or organization does to guard its interest, assets

and preserve its good name in a situation of an unforeseen event that impends the organization's regular procedures.

There are several comprehensive definitions of crisis communication in communications research. (Freberg, Saling and Freberg 2013) define crisis communication as the provision of timely and proper information to relevant stakeholders during a crisis in an effective and efficient manner. A previous definition by Reynold and Seeger (2005) which is similar with the above one but drives more into details by asserting that crisis communication “seeks to explain the specific occurrence, distinguish possible consequences and results, and offer definite damage-minimizing information to communities impacted by the vent in an authentic, sincere, quick, correct, and comprehensive way.” The two definitions of crisis communications indicate that crisis communication ought to be efficient as well as effective to achieve the very inherent goals of crisis communication. This, of course, is logical and obvious. The question at hand, however, is how to ensure effective and efficient crisis communication. This paper will address the utilization of social media platforms for crisis communication, which serves various purposes and goals. Timothy Coombs, the creator of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, suggests that crisis communication is employed either to repair a damaged reputation after a crisis or to prevent reputation damage during a crisis. While it is recommended by several authors, such as Coombs & Holladay (2010) and Freberg et al., (2013) to develop crisis communication plans, the actual communication process occurs in the moment when a crisis arises and continues thereafter. Coombs emphasizes that the primary objective of crisis communication is to ensure the safety of stakeholders by taking every measure to protect them. In other words, the initial mission is to provide stakeholders with the necessary information to safeguard themselves from any physical threats posed by the crisis. Examples of this can include

sounding sirens to prompt people to seek shelter or issuing warnings to avoid consuming contaminated food. These ethical responsibilities are integral for companies when facing a crisis.

Crises are viewed as a threat to the reputation of an organization or entity, and they could harm the organization's reputation, and these changes may have an impact on how stakeholders engage with it. Reputation building communications also known as post-crisis communication is very helpful to restoration of image of an organization as well as prevent reputational harm (W. Coombs, Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. 2007).

The Coombs & Holladay (2010) crisis communication model is a framework for managing communication during a crisis. The model is based on the idea that effective communication is essential in managing a crisis, and that organizations can take specific steps to ensure that their crisis communication is both effective and ethical. The Coombs and Holladay model is divided into four stages: pre-crisis, crisis event, post-crisis, and learning. During the pre-crisis stage, organizations should focus on developing a crisis communication plan and identifying potential risks. This involves conducting a risk assessment and identifying potential crisis scenarios. The crisis communication plan should include a crisis communication team, a crisis communication protocol, and a crisis communication training program. During the crisis event stage, organizations should focus on communicating effectively with stakeholders. This involves providing accurate and timely information, being transparent about the situation, and showing empathy and concern for those affected by the crisis. Organizations should also use multiple channels of communication to reach stakeholders, including social media, websites, and traditional media. During the post-crisis stage, organizations should focus on assessing the effectiveness of their crisis communication and identifying areas for improvement. This involves

conducting a post-crisis evaluation and reviewing the crisis communication plan to identify improvements that can be made. Organizations should concentrate on implementing the crisis's lessons into their crisis communication plan during the learning stage. This entails revising the crisis communication plan to consider the lessons discovered and guaranteeing that the crisis communication team has received training to handle potential crises. Overall, the Coombs and Holladay 2010 crisis communication model emphasizes the importance of effective communication in managing a crisis. The model provides a framework for organizations to follow to ensure that their crisis communication is both effective and ethical (Coombs and Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* 2010).

There are several ways to define a crisis in an organizational situation, for example Fern-Banks (2007) defines crisis in an organization as it as a main occurrence of an event with a suppositionally detrimental consequence affecting an institution, an organization, a company, or an industry as well as its stakeholders, its products of it are a producer, its good reputation, and the general public. Another definition by (Thelwall and Stuart 2008) says that crisis is an abrupt and uncontrollable incident that can threaten the reputation and products/services of an entity or an organization and in some cases the lives and securities of citizens.

Crises can potentially hurt an organization and its stakeholders since they are frequently unpredictable (Massey and Larsen 2006). A crisis is a low-probability, high-impact incident that can jeopardize the organization's continued existence and frequently necessitates hasty actions. Crises disrupt daily operations and frequently endanger an organization's existence. Practitioners need to be aware that responding to crises has a very limited window of opportunity and that doing so could endanger the organization and its core principles (Campbell 2012). Countries, institutions, and commercial enterprises frequently find themselves in what we would classify as

crisis situations. Even if a nation or organization is alert and actively works to prevent crises, neither is immune to them anywhere in the globe. Due to the reality of crises, crisis management is necessary for planning and being ready to act and the most important elements of crisis management in any crisis situation is communication which is dissemination of appropriate information in a timely manner. Over the past decade, there has been a massive increase in the use of social; media as a crisis communication tool in businesses, institutions, and even government (Coombs and Holladay, The Handbook of Crisis Communication 2010).

2.2. Crisis Communication Theories

There are many theoretical models for effective crisis communication that have been proposed by crisis communication theorists. The most know and widely used crisis communication models are:

Image Restoration Theory (IRT) - a crisis communication theory developed by William L. Benoit. IRT is focused on how an organization can restore its image and reputation following a crisis. The theory suggests that there are five main strategies that an organization can use to restore its image.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) – first developed by a leading crisis communication intellectual Dr. Timothy Coombs, this theory aids to guide organizations for effort during times of crisis to communicate. The theory suggests that how an organization responds to a crisis can have a significant impact on public perception and the ultimate outcome of the crisis.

Social Mediated Crisis Communication Theory (SMCCT) – Developed by communication scholars Yan Jin and Brooke Fisher Liu SMCCT emphasises the different role social media

platform and blogs play in crisis communication and proposes that social media has fundamentally changed the way organizations communicate during a crisis, and that it has created new challenges and opportunities for crisis communication. The theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique characteristics of social media and tailoring crisis communication strategies accordingly.

2.2.1 The Image Restoration Theory (IRT)

Image Restoration Theory is a theoretical framework developed by William Benoit in 1995. The theory intentions are to support organizations rebuild their image and reputation after a crisis happened. According to the theory, when an organization is involved in a crisis, the public judges the organization and attribute a certain level of responsibility for the crisis. Benoit first introduced the image restoration theory, also known as image repair theory, which describes methods for repairing a reputation after it has been harmed (Benoit 1997). The organization must then take specific steps to restore its image and credibility. This theory suggests that for organizations to repair their reputation after a crisis, they need to use a two-step approach: first, take responsibility for the crisis, and then offer some kind of remedy (like compensation or a plan for preventing a recurrence). proposes that organizations can use specific communication strategies to restore their image after a crisis. Benoit's theory proposes five image restoration strategies that organizations can use to rebuild their reputation: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

Benoit states that image, also known as reputation, is important to institutions. This is supported by multiple researchers such as (Coombs and Holladay, The Handbook of Crisis Communication 2010). Image is important to organizations even though it is to a growing extent not the whole audience shares a single impression. The theory of image restoration can be used as a method to

comprehend both individual and corporate crises and its purpose is to shield an institution, a company, an organization or even an individual, confronting a challenge that may taint its reputation due to the image of the products or services as well as self-images. (Coombs and Holladay, Crisis communication, risk communication, and issues management. 2019) outline the phases of image restoration theory in a five-stage structure to alleviate the damage of crisis in a company's reputation labeling crisis communication as a purposeful strategy to achieve a given goal of image and reputation restoration.

Usually, there are multiple audiences that organizations need to address, and these audiences may have varying interests, concerns, and objectives. Therefore, the crisis communicator must prioritize the audience. Social media could help in addressing these audiences with differing agendas because it increases the number of different communication platforms drastically and makes it easier to address smaller individual groups. Based on the symbolic approaches of 'apologia' and 'accounts', Benoit developed the image restoration theory and argued that an attack with two dimensions which are an offensive act and an accusation of responsibility for the action might threaten the image of an organization or individual. W.L. Benoit, similarly, proposed five key strategies to enable institutions/organizations uphold their image and positive reputation. The five strategies of the IRT are denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of an event, corrective action, and mortification. Public relation practitioners could decide the strategy for the crisis's communication based on significance of the crisis situation, and they can time and again use a mix of the different strategies (Benoit 1997).

Denial: This strategy involves denying that the crisis occurred or denying that the organization is responsible for the crisis, and it mainly focuses on denying the crisis happened or refute their connection and involvement in performing the crisis. It is a simple denial or shifting the

blame, which means ‘the communicator can simply deny that the incident happened or shift the blame in hopes of absolution of culpability.

Evading Responsibility: This strategy involves accepting responsibility for the crisis but minimizing the organization's role in causing it. When it is impossible to deny for organization about their involvements in the crisis, organizations could attempt to dodge the accountability by employing one of these methods. The accused organizations or people may argue that they had no knowledge of or control over the act in question, that it was an accident, or that it was justified based on good rather than evil intentions.

Reducing Offensiveness of the Event: This strategy involves taking steps to reduce the negative impact of the crisis, such as offering compensation or showing concern for those affected by the crisis. Benoit (1995) suggested that organizations can strategies to reduce offensiveness, that include: i) bolstering — decrease the offensiveness of the public by retelling the company’s positive qualities; ii) minimization—, efforts to persuade the public that the crisis in question is less grave that it seems iii) differentiation— appealing the damage of the crisis is minimal, comparing the act to a similar act, iv) transcendence — introduction the action in a different context, attacking accuser and compensation.

Corrective action: This strategy involves taking steps to address the root cause of the crisis and prevent similar crises from occurring in the future. In this strategy, the accused claims that they will correct the problem by restoring the circumstances to its previous situation or promising to make modifications to ensure it will never happen again. This will include for an entity might carry on remedial actions or acts to ensure the statues queso or performances vows to alter and prevent a repeat of the crisis.

Mortification: This strategy involves admitting fault and apologizing for the crisis and taking steps to make amends. This is achieved by acknowledging the accountability for the crisis, stating remorse, and requesting for pardon.

According to IRT, the effectiveness of each strategy depends on the specific context of the crisis and the organization's reputation and history. The theory suggests that organizations should choose the strategy that is most appropriate for the crisis and the audience they are trying to reach. Overall, IRT provides a useful framework for understanding how organizations can restore their image and reputation following a crisis. By considering the specific context of the crisis and the organization's reputation and history, organizations can choose effective communication strategies that help to minimize the negative impact of the crisis and maintain the trust and support of their stakeholders.

2.2.2 The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Developed by Timothy Coombs in 2007 the SCCT theory aims to guide organizations on how to choose the most appropriate communication strategies during a crisis. It is a framework for understanding how managers can use crisis communication to protect reputational assets during a crisis. This theory emphasizes the importance of matching crisis response strategies to the nature and intensity of the crisis. It offers specific guidance on strategies like denying, diminishing, and attributing blame. SCCT is a form of crisis communication that is used by governments and organizations to respond to unexpected events that could potentially damage their reputation or public image. This type of communication involves creating a plan for quick and effective responses to crisis situations, whether they be natural disasters, product recalls, data breaches, or other unexpected incidents. The objective of situational crisis communication is to minimize damage to an organization's reputation, prevent misunderstandings and panic, and ensure that

stakeholders receive accurate and timely information. suggests that the way an organization communicates during a crisis can either worsen or improve the situation. The theory proposes a set of guidelines for choosing the most effective communication strategies based on the crisis and the organization's reputation.

SCCT proposes that there are three key factors that influence how stakeholders (such as customers, employees, and the public) perceive a crisis and an organization's response:

The type of crisis - not all crises are the same, and several types of crises require different communication strategies. For example, a natural disaster will require a different response than a product recall.

The level of responsibility attributed to the organization - stakeholders will judge an organization's response differently depending on how much responsibility they believe the organization bears for the crisis.

The reputation of the organization prior to the crisis - an organization with a strong reputation prior to a crisis will likely fare better in the eyes of stakeholders than an organization with a poor reputation.

SCCT proposes that communication managers should adapt their strategic crisis communications efforts to the degree of crisis responsibility and reputational risk posed by the crisis. Coombs defined three different sorts of crises, which he referred to as crisis clusters, in his journal article titled "Protecting Organization reputations during a crisis."

Victim cluster: here, crisis situations such as manmade or natural disasters, violence at workplace and rumors of inappropriate conducts, as well as product tampering/malevolence are

the subcategories of the crisis of victim cluster the organization or entity itself is also a casualty of the crisis. A company's responsibility to any image tainting events of this category is not strong and the threat for image and reputational damage is also lower.

Accidental cluster: In this cluster the acts of the company that led to the crisis such as accidents and products harms because of technical error are unintentional. The company's or organizations' attribution to the crisis of this cluster is minimal with only a moderate threat to the company's reputation.

Preventable cluster: This cluster states that organizations intentionally exposed people to risky situations, they take incorrect measures or breached regulation and laws that include accidents and products alarms because of human errors, etc. are some of the good examples of this cluster and organizations in a crisis of this cluster create a powerful acknowledgement to the accountability.

2.2.3 Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Theory (SMCCT)

SMCCT that specifically gives emphasis to the role of social media platforms in crisis communication was developed by communication scholars Yan Jin and Brooke Fisher Liu in 2010. This theory proposes that social media should be integrated into crisis communication strategies (Liu, Austin and Jin 2012). The theory suggests that social media can be an effective tool for crisis communication, but that organizations must be prepared to respond quickly and transparently to online feedback. The theory aims to help organizations understand how social media can be integrated into crisis communication strategies. According to the theory, social media can be a powerful tool for crisis communication, but organizations must be prepared to respond quickly and transparently to online feedback. The social-mediated crisis communication model is a more recent crisis communication model. SMCC Theory proposes three key

components that should be considered when using social media for crisis communication (Liu, Austin and Jin 2012):

Social media characteristics: This refers to the unique features of social media platforms, such as real-time communication, interactivity, and user-generated content. Organizations must understand these features and use them to their advantage during a crisis.

Crisis communication strategies: This refers to the communication strategies that organizations use to respond to the crisis. SMCC Theory suggests that organizations should adopt a proactive and transparent communication strategy that engages stakeholders in dialogue and provides real-time updates.

Outcomes: This refers to the impact of social media on crisis communication. SMCC Theory suggests that social media can help organizations to reach a wider audience, build trust and credibility, and respond more quickly to changing events.

Overall, SMCC Theory provides a useful framework for organizations to integrate social media into their crisis communication strategies. By understanding the unique features of social media, adopting a proactive and transparent communication strategy, and engaging stakeholders in dialogue, organizations can leverage social media to improve their crisis communication efforts. SMCCT proposes that social media has fundamentally changed the way organizations communicate during a crisis, and that it has created new challenges and opportunities for crisis communication. The theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the unique characteristics of social media and tailoring crisis communication strategies accordingly.

SMCCT identifies several key characteristics of social media that are relevant to crisis communication:

Speed - social media allows information to spread rapidly, which can be both an advantage and a disadvantage for organizations during a crisis.

Reach - social media has a vast audience, and crisis communication efforts on social media can reach a large number of people quickly.

Interactivity - social media allows for two-way communication, which can be useful for organizations to engage with stakeholders during a crisis.

Multimodality - social media allows for the use of various forms of media, including text, images, and video, which can enhance the effectiveness of crisis communication.

Based on these characteristics, SMCCT suggests that organizations should adopt the following strategies for crisis communication on social media. These are monitor and listen to social media conversations to stay informed about the crisis and how stakeholders are responding. Use social media to disseminate accurate and timely information about the crisis, and to correct any misinformation that may be circulating. Engage with stakeholders on social media to address their concerns and answer their questions. Use social media to demonstrate empathy and concern for those affected by the crisis. Use social media to coordinate with other organizations and stakeholders involved in the crisis response. SMCCT also emphasizes the importance of ongoing evaluation and adjustment of crisis communication strategies on social media, as the situation evolves, and new information becomes available.

2.3. Social Media

Social media platforms that include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram etc describes to cyber platforms and applications that allow people to create contents, share them and interact with other users of the platforms. Social media platforms typically allow users to create a profile, share content such as photos and videos, and engage with other users through comments, likes, and private messages. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube, among many others. Each platform has its own unique features and user base, catering to different interests and types of content. Social media has now become a progressively more customary way for people to connect with acquaintances and families, stay informed about current events, and engage with communities and causes that are important to them. It has also become a powerful tool for businesses and organizations to reach and engage with customers and supporters. However, social media can also have negative effects, such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for cyberbullying and harassment. It is important for individuals and social media platforms to be mindful of these potential harms and work to mitigate them.

They are described as a group of internet-based tools that came from conceptual and high-tech foundations of Web 2.0, and that permit the creation of content (text, audio, video) and exchange them using user-generated content (UGC)," and they have quickly speeded throughout nations in the twenty-first century. Social media offer an interactive and modern platform for active social involvement, in contrast to traditional media (such as television) where users are passive recipients. This has changed how information is sent and received. On the one hand, "gate watchers" on social media not only act as "gatekeepers" by disseminating news, but they also

edit and republish it in response to comments made by the online community (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

The Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines social media platforms as any forms of electronic communication through which users create cyber communities to share contents such as texts, audios and videos to share opinions, ideas, personal messages, and currently, social media platforms have become strongly connected to social terms rather than business and commercial terms. The general public uses the term as frequently as communication experts and public relations practitioners. (Austin and Jin 2018) defined social media using a quotation from Pew Internet and American Life as "an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new age of internet enabled tools are established around user-generated or user-manipulated content, such as Wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites." The authors pointed out that social media encompass various digital tools and applications to communicate and exchange content among individuals, the public, and organizations and those tools offer functions coordinated with other social media applications. Among the many social media, the government mainly uses two of them Facebook and Twitter (Austin and Jin 2018).

More than two-thirds (67.1%) of the world's population today uses a mobile phone, with the number of unique users expected to reach 5.31 billion by the beginning of 2022, according to the Datareportal 2022 report. Similar to this, currently 62.5% of the global population that is around 4.95 billion people use the internet worldwide, as well as 4.62 billion people utilizing social media globally, which represents 58.4% of the global population. At the beginning of 2022, Ethiopia had 6.35 million users of social media and 58.54 million cellular mobile connections, according to data from GSMA Intelligence. Facebook users in Ethiopia reached 5.95 million,

while 606.5 thousand and 34.0 thousand people use Instagram and Twitter in Ethiopia (Datareportal 2022).

2.4. Social Media and Crisis Communication

The concept of social media has transformed the way in which individuals communicate with each other, and the role of social media in crisis communication has been growing in modern times. The present paper aims to build a conceptual framework for the research on the role of social media for crisis communication. The research identifies reliable sources, organizes the material in a well-structured way and documents it accurately with citations. The framework has been created to explore the significance of social media during different stages of the crisis, the challenges faced by social media communication, and the potential impact of social media on crisis management. Social media plays a huge role in crisis communication as it allows for quick and widespread dissemination of information (Austin and Jin 2018).

Social media has evolved over the years, with the development of new platforms and features that enable users to connect with others, share information, and build communities.

During a crisis, social media can be used to keep people informed about the situation, provide updates and instructions, and address any concerns or questions that people may have. Social media platforms can also be used to monitor the situation and respond to any misinformation or rumours that may be spreading. In addition, social media can be used to mobilize resources and provide support to those affected by the crisis. Overall, social media has become an increasingly important tool in crisis communication and is an essential part of any crisis response strategy. Social media has become an increasingly important channel for crisis communication in recent years. With the rise of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram,

people can access and share information about a crisis in real-time, making it a powerful tool for organizations to communicate with the public during a crisis (White 2012).

There is no shortage of projections for public relations and social media. Social media can provide a direct and immediate way to inform and update stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the wider public. It can also be used to correct misinformation, respond to questions and concerns, and provide reassurance and support. However, social media also presents some challenges for crisis communication. Information can spread quickly and widely, making it challenging to govern the story line and safeguard accurateness. The speed and informality of social media can also lead to errors or miscommunications, which can further complicate the crisis (Breakenridge 2012).

The use of social media during crisis communication has gained immense significance in recent times. The ability of social media to instantly connect with many people has the potential to influence the course of the crisis, both positively and negatively. The present paper aims to create a conceptual framework for research on the role of social media for crisis communication. Public relations can benefit greatly from the use of social media and modern Internet technology. The new function the Internet can play in information gathering for the general public and for themselves must be understood by public relations professionals (Wright and Hinson 2019). Blogging and other Internet technologies have altered how public relations is carried out. According to a PR professionals poll conducted in 2009 73% of PR professionals have confirmed that the introduction of blogs and other forms of social media have changed the way they interact with their target audiences. An updated examination of social media's effect on public relations techniques. PR professionals have to include social media into their PR practises because they

have the potential to help to image building and agenda setting (Freberg, Saling and Freberg 2013).

Although many individuals still learn about crises through traditional media outlets today, online social media is becoming a more popular source of information (W. T. Coombs, Ongoing Crisis Communications 2014). In recent years, social media has emerged as a crucial tool for crisis communication. Social media provides several advantages in crisis communication, but it also has a number of drawbacks. Organizations should use social media cautiously while ensuring that they have the expertise to use it correctly. When used effectively, social media can facilitate immediate communication, reach a wider audience, and assist in reputation management during a crisis. The use of social media in crisis communication is expected to continue to increase in the future as social media continues to evolve.

(Freberg, Saling and Freberg 2013) developed a crisis communication model that emphasizes the role of social media in managing a crisis. Their model consists of four phases:

- i) Detection and prevention: During this phase, an organization should monitor social media and other sources for potential crises and take steps to prevent them from occurring. This includes developing policies and procedures for social media use, training employees, and engaging with stakeholders.
- ii) Preparation: This phase involves developing a crisis communication plan that outlines roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and messaging and the crisis communication plan ought to be verified and revised in timely and regular manner to ensure that it is effective and efficient.

- iii) Response: During a crisis, an organization should respond quickly and transparently on social media and other channels. Communication should be consistent, accurate, and empathetic to meet the needs of stakeholders.
- iv) Recovery: After the crisis has been resolved, an organization should evaluate its response and communication efforts. This includes analysing social media feedback, identifying areas for improvement, and making changes to prevent similar crises from occurring in the future.

The significance of social media as a tool for crisis communication was also emphasised by (Freberg, Saling and Freberg 2013). They argued during crisis social media are ideal for a two-way communication with stakeholders and real-time feedback. To prevent the spread of false information and unfavourable attitudes, it also calls for rigorous management. A solid social media strategy may support efficient crisis management and ongoing stakeholder connections.

2.5. Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study establishes a conceptual framework for the role of social media in crisis communication, emphasizing its potential as a tool for disseminating accurate, reliable, and timely information, facilitating two-way communication and influencing public perception and attitude. Thus, the study framework emphasises that by harnessing the power of social media in these three dimensions, we can assess the role of social media in government crisis communication during the Tigray war.

Dissemination of Information - Accuracy, Reliability, Timeliness

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for information dissemination, offering unprecedented reach and immediacy. However, the accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of information shared on social media platforms have become a growing concern.

Accuracy refers to the correctness or truthfulness of information. Social media, with its vast and diverse user base, can be a source of both accurate and inaccurate information.

Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of information. Social media can be a reliable source of information when it comes to breaking news and real-time updates.

Timeliness refers to the speed with which information is shared. Social media platforms are often the first place where urgent information is disseminated. This can be crucial for providing timely warnings and updates during crises.

Two-Way Communication of Social Media

Social media platforms are designed to facilitate two-way communication between users. Unlike traditional media, such as television and newspapers, social media allows individuals to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of content. On social media platforms, users have the ability to create and share content, such as posts, photos, and videos (Coombs and Holladay, Crisis communication, risk communication, and issues management. 2019). They can also interact with other users by commenting on or liking their content, as well as messaging them privately. This two-way communication allows for a more dynamic and interactive experience, as users can directly engage with each other and exchange ideas and opinions (Austin and Jin 2018).

Impacts of Social Media change in Public Perception and Attitude

social media has had a profound and complex impact on public perception. It has given us new ways to connect with each other, share information, and organize around social causes. It has had

a profound impact on public perception, altering the way we consume information, form opinions, and engage with the world around us.

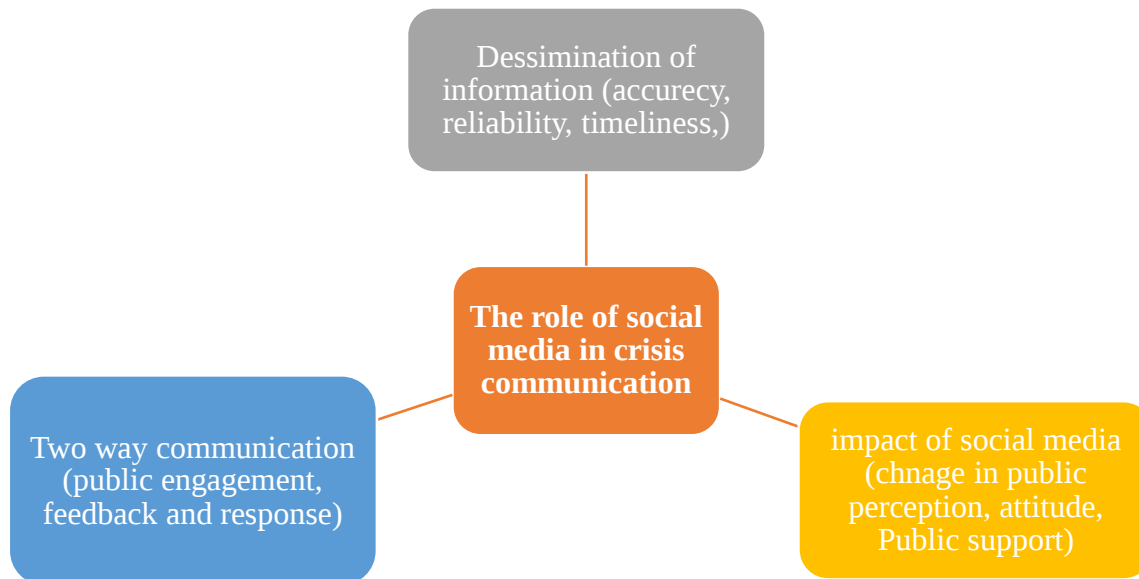


Diagram 1: Conceptual framework of the role of social media in crisis communication

2.6. Review of Empirical Studies

As discussed, social media in public relations have been gaining importance. Moreover, PR practitioners need to gradually change their use of social media along with other traditional platforms such as mass media, television, radio, publications during crisis communications. There has been a growing body of empirical research on the role of social media in government crisis communication. The Following are a few examples of empirical evidence that highlight the role of social media in crisis communication:

- i) A 2014 study by DE Alexander of the University of Queensland found that social media can help governments to communicate with the public during crises, but that governments need

to be careful to avoid using social media to spread misinformation. The study examined the use of social media by the Australian government during the 2010-2011 Queensland floods. The study found that the Australian government used social media effectively to provide information about the floods and to coordinate the response to the floods. However, the study also found that the Australian government made some mistakes in its use of social media, such as spreading misinformation about the extent of the flooding (Alexander 2014).

- ii) A study by Starbird, Maddock, Orand, and Achterman (2014) looked at the use of Twitter by the US government during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The study found that government agencies used Twitter to provide timely and relevant information to the public, and that these efforts were generally well-received by the public.
- iii) Another study by Lu, Zhang, and Liu (2015) examined the use of social media by the Chinese government during the Wenzhou train crash in 2011. The study found that social media played a critical role in providing real-time information to the public, and that the government's use of social media helped to improve transparency and public trust.
- iv) A study by Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann (2013) examined the use of social media by the Swiss government during the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011. The study found that social media played a critical role in providing real-time updates to the public, and that the government's use of social media helped to build trust and credibility with the public.
- v) A study by Zhang and Liu (2017) looked at the use of social media by the Chinese government during the Tianjin explosions in 2015. The study found that social media played a critical role in providing real-time information to the public, and that the government's use of social media helped to improve transparency and public trust.

vi) A 2018 study by Dr. Kai Haase of the University of Hamburg found that social media can be used by governments to build trust with the public during crises. The study examined the use of social media by the German government during the 2015 European migrant crisis. The study found that the German government used social media to provide information about the crisis and to answer the public's questions. The study also found that the German government used social media to build rapport with the public and to promote social cohesion.

Overall, these studies suggest that social media can be a powerful tool for government crisis communication, allowing for real-time information-sharing and improved transparency and trust with the public. However, effective use of social media requires careful planning and strategy development, as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation of social media efforts.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the research design, approach, data collection tools, analysis methods, and study area description. The research design aligns with the research questions and objectives, ensuring credible and relevant findings. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative techniques for a comprehensive understanding. Data collection tools include surveys, and KIIs. Data analysis methods extract patterns, themes, and relationships from the survey and KIIs. The study area description provides context for interpreting the findings. the chapter serves as a roadmap for the research process, ensuring rigorous and systematic research.

3.1. Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed in this study to examine the role of social media in crisis communication during the Tigray War. This choice was made for several compelling reasons. Descriptive research provides a foundational understanding of the situation, allowing for the collection of comprehensive data on social media usage by the Ethiopian government during the conflict. This data sheds light on the government's communication strategies, their effectiveness in reaching different audiences, and the identification of trends and patterns in social media engagement throughout the crisis.

Furthermore, descriptive research lays the groundwork for more focused studies on specific aspects of social media usage, such as its impact on public opinion or its role in shaping the narrative of the conflict. This flexibility allows for the incorporation of various data collection methods, including surveys and KIIs, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

In conclusion, descriptive research design proved to be a robust and versatile approach to exploring the intricate role of social media in crisis communication during the Tigray War. By establishing a solid understanding of the current landscape, identifying patterns, and laying the foundation for further research, descriptive research can inform effective communication strategies and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of social media's influence in times of crisis.

3.2. Research Approach

In this study, I used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data which allows for a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in crisis communication by capturing both the breadth and depth of the phenomenon. A mixed-methods approach offers several advantages for studying the role of social media in crisis communication. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, I can gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Quantitative data, such as perceptions and impacts of social media communication from survey responses, can reveal trends in content, timeliness and accuracy of information, public engagement, and responsiveness for feedbacks and comments, providing insights into the overall patterns of social media use during a crisis. Qualitative data, such as information and opinions from key informant interviews, can provide deeper insights into motivations, perceptions, and experiences, shedding light on the underlying reasons for specific behaviours and the impact of social media on individuals and groups.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach allows for triangulation of findings, strengthening the credibility and validity of the research. When findings from different data sources converge, it lends greater confidence to the conclusions drawn, providing a more robust understanding of the complex relationships between social media and crisis communication.

The Tigray War in Ethiopia presents a particularly challenging context for studying the role of social media in crisis communication. The conflict has been characterized by information scarcity and controlled communication, making it difficult to obtain reliable data and assess the impact of social media on the crisis. A mixed-methods approach can help overcome these challenges by combining data from various sources, including social media posts, interviews with key stakeholders, and official statements.

In addition, the Tigray War involves a diverse range of actors, including the Ethiopian government, Tigrayan opposition groups, international organizations, and civilian users. Each of these actors has distinct motivations, perspectives, and strategies for using social media during the crisis. A mixed-methods approach can capture these diverse perspectives and experiences, providing a more nuanced understanding of the role of social media in the conflict.

A mixed-methods approach provides a holistic understanding of social media's role in crisis communication. Quantitative data reveals trends, while qualitative data sheds light on motivations and experiences. Triangulating findings strengthens research credibility.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

Survey Questionnaires: Online surveys using the Google Form is used to collect quantifiable data from randomly selected respondents. The population for the survey is people from different walks of life, with diverse age, sex, and diversified educational status. 200 respondents were selected from target sample of 2,000 people using purposive random sampling techniques to make sure representative of the target population by sex, age education status, are used to collect data through surveys.

There are several advantages of using survey questionnaires in research. Survey questionnaires can be distributed to many people, allowing researchers to collect data from a large sample size. Survey questionnaires use standardized questions, which ensure that all participants are asked the same questions in a similar manner. This minimizes the probability of collecting biased data and information. Participants can remain anonymous when completing survey questionnaires, which may encourage them to provide more honest answers. Survey questionnaires are a cost-effective way of collecting data, as they do not require face-to-face interaction with participants. Survey questionnaires can be completed quickly and efficiently, allowing researchers to collect data in a timely manner. Survey questionnaires can be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the research question. Overall, survey questionnaires are a useful tool for researchers looking to collect data from a large sample size in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

Key Informant Interviews (KII): In addition to survey questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews with (KII) five media professionals, media/social media personalities, communication, crisis, and political commentators and scholars, researchers, and analysts on the topic were conducted using properly drafted discussion questions which are triangulated with information from the survey.

Key informant interviews were conducted through face-to-face interviews and are aimed at collecting qualitative data. Following the collection of the survey results, responses data were transcribed, and analyzed and triangulated with results from the survey questionnaires. These helps to see how the government uses social media in its crisis communication and help to answer the original research questions the role social media played in government crisis communication of the Tigray war. The following are list of the key informants of this study.

Informant 1, (interviewed on May 17,2023), is a known social media personality and a lecturer of Law at one of the public universities. With more than 246K followers on Facebook, 180.3K on Twitter and 72.6K on Telegram, he is one of the leading social media activists of the country. His active involvement in social media battles during the Tigray crisis supporting the Ethiopian government and ENDF has made him a prominent social media activist in the country.

Informant 2, (interviewed on May 9, 2023) is a seasoned researcher and lecturer at one of the respected universities in the country. He has a keen interest in media and communication and has been observing the development of social media as the major means of communication particularly during times of crisis such as the Tigray war.

Informants 3, 4, and 5, are journalist and media personalities who have long years of experience in the field.

Informant 3, (interviewed on May 11, 2023), is an experienced journalist and media professional has worked as editor in chief to some of the biggest media outlets including local and international media outlets. She also works as a consultant and trainer in media management and journalism. She has extensively travelled during the Tigray crises to do reports and followed the government's press releases, press conferences as well as social media communications.

Informant 4 (interviewed on May 16, 2023) is a versatile young journalist who is now the editor in chief at one of the country's biggest newspapers. He is very critical in reviewing government communication sharing his thoughts and opinions on the current socio-political sphere of the country. He has been following the development and government communications during the Tigray conflict.

Informant 5 (interviewed on May 12, 2023) is an editor at one of the government media with more than 17 years of experience. She is an active participant in the Ethiopian media and social media conversations.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

Statistical methods are widely used in social sciences to analyse and interpret data. They are an essential tool for researchers in fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and many others. Statistical methods play a crucial role in social sciences research by providing a systematic and objective way to analyse data and test hypotheses (Bergin 2018).

Some common statistical methods used in social sciences include:

Descriptive statistics: These methods involve summarizing and describing data using measures such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range.

Inferential statistics: Utilising sample data to derive conclusions about the population from which the sample was drawn is known as inferential statistics. Regression analysis, confidence intervals, and hypothesis testing are a few examples of inferential statistics (Lovric 2016).

Survey research: This involves collecting data from a sample of individuals using questionnaires or interviews. Survey research often involves statistical analyses such as factor analysis, principal component analysis, and cluster analysis.

A combination of the different statistical methods is used in studying the role of social media in crisis communication. By combining these methods with qualitative analysis and expert knowledge, this study gains a more complete understanding of how social media can be used to effectively communicate during times of crisis.

3.5. Description of the Study Area

This study is conducted in Addis Ababa. As a study area for the survey, Addis Ababa offers a diverse and dynamic population with a range of interests and perspectives. The city's demographic characteristics include a mix of urban and rural populations, as well as people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the city's rapid growth and development present unique challenges and opportunities for research and analysis. Located at the centre from all directions of the nation, Ethiopia's capital; city Addis Ababa is the largest city and one of the fastest-growing cities in Africa. The city covers an area of 527 square kilometres and is home to over 5.4 million people from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (UN 2023).

Addis Ababa is situated at an altitude of 2,355 meters above sea level, making it the third-highest capital city in the world. The city is surrounded by hills and mountains, including Mount Entoto, which is the highest peak in the city. The city is divided into 10 sub-cities, which are further divided into 116 woredas or districts. Each sub-city has its own administration and is responsible for providing basic services, such as health care, education, and sanitation, to its residents. Addis Ababa is known for its rich history, diverse culture, and vibrant arts scene. The city is home to many museums, galleries, and cultural institutions, including the National Museum of Ethiopia, which houses the famous Lucy skeleton, and the Ethiopian National Theatre, which hosts cultural performances and events.

This study is conducted in Addis Ababa where sample respondents are reached on an online platform to complete the questionnaires. As the capital city of the nation, the city accommodates people from different walks of life with diverse opinions and views who speak a diverse language and from diversified ethnic and religious backgrounds. This makes the study area ideal with unbiased and diversified respondents.

CHAPTER 4 - DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data collected from the study, analyzes the data to identify patterns and trends, and discusses the findings in relation to previous research and practice. The data is presented in charts and graphs to facilitate understanding and interpretation. Statistical methods are employed to examine the data and draw meaningful conclusions. The findings of the study are discussed in the context of previous research and their implications for practice are considered. The data presentation, analysis, and discussion provide valuable insights into the research problem and contribute to the body of knowledge in the field. The findings have the potential to inform future research and practice.

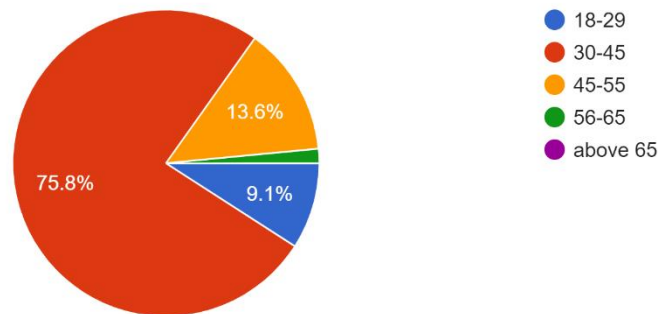
4.1. Demographic Analysis

4.1.1. Age, Sex, Education and Employment of Respondents

Demographic analysis in a study refers to the process of examining the characteristics of the individuals who participated in the survey and key informant interviews. The demographic analysis in this study includes variables such as age, gender, education, and employment status and educational and professional experiences of respondents. The purpose of the analysis is to gain a better understanding of the survey respondents so as to identify any trends or patterns that may exist within different subgroups. From the total of 200 respondents selected using a simple random sampling from 2,000 target population, 196 has responded to the survey completing the 40 questions.

3. What age group do you belong to?

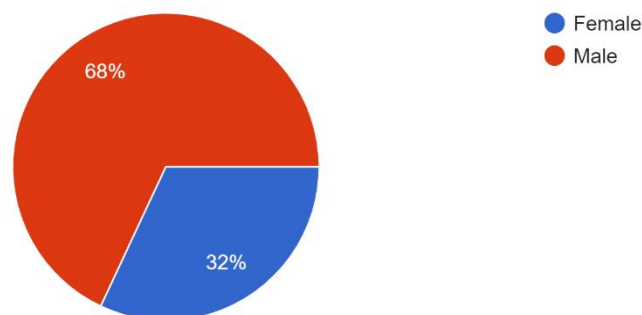
198 responses



The majority of respondents, 150 out of the 198, i.e., 75.8% of them fall under the age category of 30-45 years old. While around 9.1% of the respondents of the survey are between the ages of 18-29 years the rest 15.1% are above the age of 45. Age group demography can be an important factor in research, as different age groups may have different experiences, perspectives, and behaviours. In this research as the different age groups are included, we can say that the study is representative of the different age groups of our society.

4. What is your gender?

197 responses

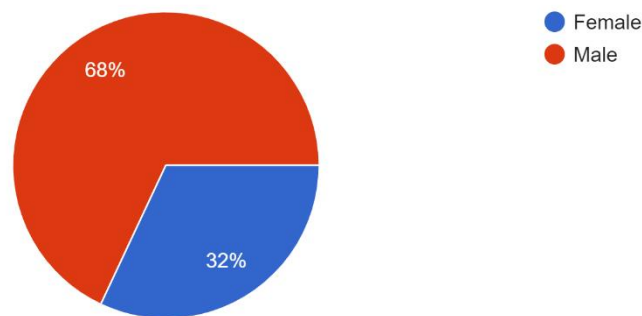


Similarly, gender balance in a study is important as it ensures that the sample is representative of the population being studied. This is important because men and women may have different

experiences, perspectives, and behaviours, which could influence the results of the study. Gender balance ensures that the findings of the study can be generalized to the broader population. It is also important from an ethical standpoint, as it ensures both men and women have the opportunity to participate in the study and to have their voices heard. Overall, gender balance in research is important because it ensures representativeness, generalizability, avoids bias, and addresses ethical considerations.

4. What is your gender?

197 responses



In this study, I have tried to ensure proportional participation of women in both the survey studies and key informant interviews. While 63 of the total 198 respondents of the survey that is more than 32% are female. Similarly, two of the five key informants of the study are also female. This seems proportional considering the number of females who actively participate in social media. (According to Data Portal 2023 report, there were around 6.4m social media users in Ethiopia in January 2023. From this number a total of 34.1% social media users were female, while 65.9% were male).

In this study, while 53.3% of respondents have a master's degree or above educational attainment, 40.6% of respondents have a first degree. This ensures that the survey is completed

by educated people who provides relatively an accurate evaluation of the topic under study. The education level and employer of survey respondents also play an important role in survey results. The education level of survey respondents can impact their ability to understand and respond to survey questions. Individuals with higher levels of education may have a deeper understanding of the topic being studied and may be more likely to provide thoughtful, nuanced responses. Conversely, individuals with lower levels of education may have difficulty understanding complex survey questions, which could lead to inaccurate or incomplete responses.

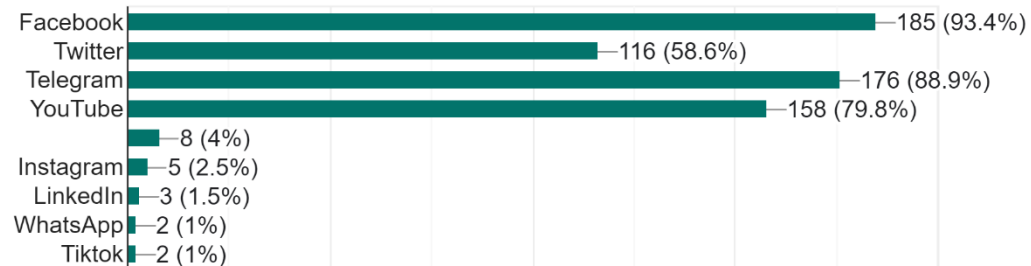
Similarly, the employer of survey respondents can impact their attitudes and behaviours in responding a survey questionnaire. In this study respondents of the survey are from different types of employers in a proportional manner – government employees (31.6%), private sector including self-employment (34.2%), and those working in non-governmental organizations (30.1%). In conclusion respondents of the survey are proportional when we look at their age, gender balance, educational attainment, and workplace/employers. This ensures that the responses in the survey are representatives, balanced and well-articulated.

4.1.2. Preferred Social Media Platforms

In this study it is found that respondents rely on social media to get their daily information needs. Respondents use multiple sources of social media platforms to get the information they needed. Most of the 198 respondents confirmed that they use multiple social media platforms as the source of their daily information needs. Facebook, Telegram, You Tube, and Twitter are their source of information in that order.

8. Which social media platforms do you use? MULTIPLE answers possible.

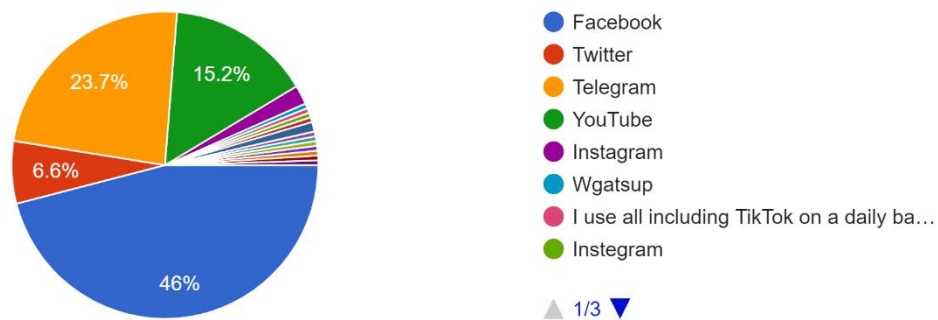
198 responses



Concerning the most preferred source of information, 46% respondents of the study identified Facebook as their most preferred source of information while 23.7% prefer Telegram, 15.2% YouTube and 6.6% Twitter as their main preferred social media channels to get information.

9. Which social media platforms do you use the MOST?

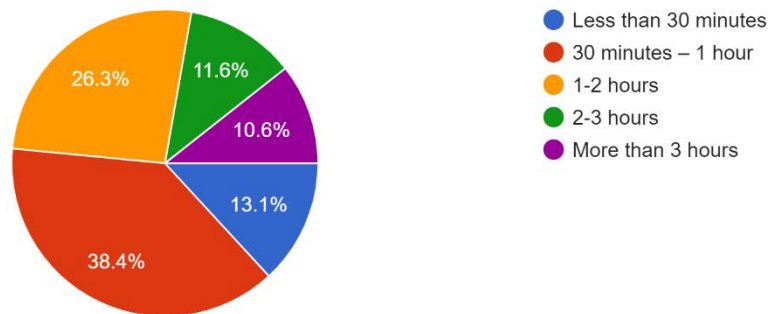
198 responses



Furthermore, the frequency with which people check social media varies depending on the individual interests and their habits. The results of this study also show that more than 90% of the respondents check their social media at least once a day. While 48.5% of respondents confirm that they spend at least more than an hour per day on social media, a chunk of them, 38.4%, spend 30 minutes to one hour a day on social media sites. The rest 13.1% of respondents spend less than half an hour a day on social media.

13. On an average how much time do you spend on social media per day?

198 responses

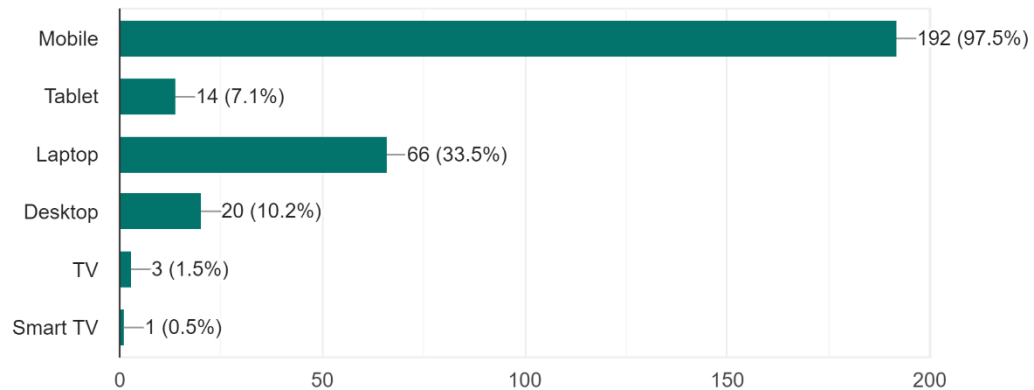


From the type of content and formats of social media contents, though most of respondents look for a mixed type of contents such as political news and analysis, social and entertainment contents as well as business and lifestyle contents, the first two are the most thought after content types in social media. Similarly, respondents revealed that they prefer multiple contents formats such as written contents, photos, videos and memes – written content and videos being the most preferred social media content formats.

The study reveals that though a few people use multiple devices to access social media platforms, mobile phone is the major go to device to access social media outlets. More than 97% of respondents say that mobile phones are their major connecting devices to social media posts. Laptop, tablets, and desktop are also mentioned as alternative device for accessing social media.

14. What is your go-to device to access your social media feed? (MULTIPLE answers possible).

197 responses



4.1.3. Preferred Social Media Contents

10. What type of content do you prefer on your social media? (MULTIPLE answers possible).

198 responses

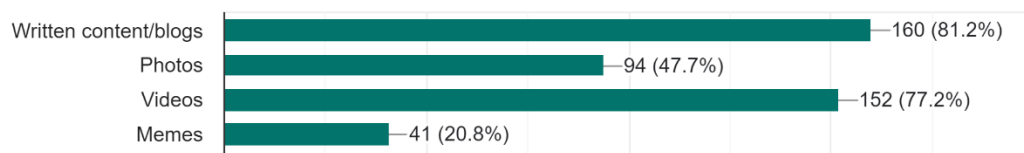


According to the majority of respondents, they consume a variety of social media content, including political news and analysis, social and entertainment, as well as business and health and lifestyle. Among the different formats available, written content/blogs are preferred by 81.2% of the respondents, followed by videos, which are the most popular format with 77.2% of the respondents. While there is a demand for various types of content and formats on social media, political news and analysis, as well as social and entertainment content, are the most sought-after. Additionally, respondents expressed a preference for multiple content formats, including written content, photos, videos, and memes, with written content and videos being the most favored formats on social media.

In summary, the survey revealed that most respondents consume a mix of social media content, covering political, social, entertainment, business, and lifestyle topics. Their preferences for content formats showed a strong inclination towards written content/blogs and videos. The most desirable types of content were political news and analysis, along with social and entertainment content. Furthermore, respondents expressed an interest in various formats, embracing written content, photos, videos, and memes, with a particular emphasis on written content and videos.

11. How do you prefer your social media content formats? (MULTIPLE answers possible).

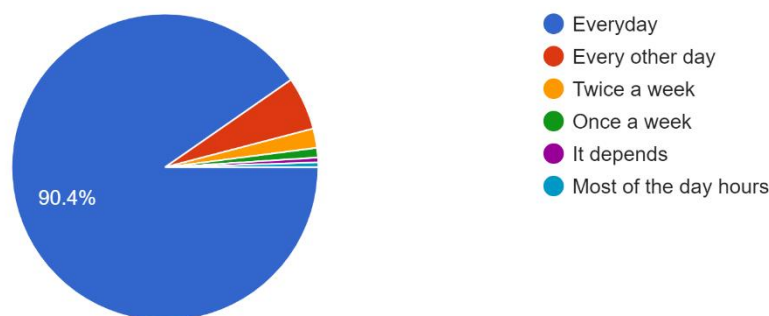
197 responses



4.1.4. Time Spent on Social Media

12. How often do you check in to your social media accounts in any given week?

197 responses



Furthermore, the frequency with which people check social media varies depending on the individual interests and their habits. However, studies have shown that, on average, people check their social media accounts multiple times per day. A study conducted by Global Web Index in 2020 found that the average internet user spends about 2 hours and 22 minutes per day on social

media. Similarly, the results of this study also show that more than 90% of the respondents check their social media at least once a day. While 48.5% of respondents confirm that they spend at least more than an hour per day on social media. Another 38.4% of respondents spend 30 minutes to one hour a day on social media sites. The rest 13.1% of respondents spend less than half an hour a day on social media.

The table and the pie chart show the percentage of respondents who use social media for different amounts of time per day. We can see, a substantial number of respondents (48.5%) spend more than an hour per day on social media. Another 38.4% of respondents spend 30 minutes to one hour per day on social media sites. The rest 13.1% of respondents spend less than half an hour per day on social media. These findings are consistent with other studies that have shown that social media use is high among adults. For example, a 2018 study by the Pew Research Center found that 72% of U.S. adults use social media at least once a day. The high levels of social media use among adults can have a number of implications. For example, social media use has been linked to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Additionally, social media use can interfere with work and productivity.

Table 1: amount of time respondents spend on social media

Time spent on social media	Percentage of respondents
More than an hour	48.5%
30 minutes to 1 hour	38.4%
Less than 30 minutes	13.1%

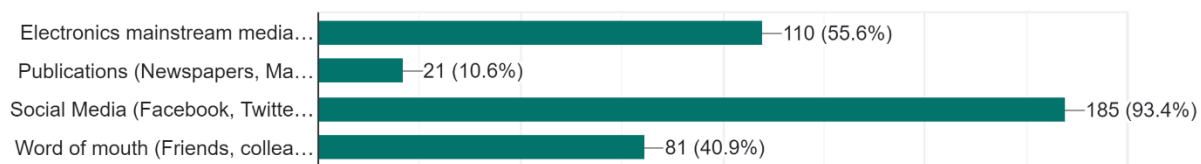
4.2. Utilization of Social Media

4.2.1. Public Information Sources

Social media platforms have overtaken traditional media as the primary and most preferred sources of information about the Tigray Conflict, with nearly 70% of survey respondents relying on social media for news and updates. This study reveals that on information-seeking behavior during the Tigray Conflict a striking shift towards social media as the dominant source of news. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube emerged as the go-to sources for information, surpassing traditional media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. This preference for social media was particularly evident in the survey results, with 93% of respondents indicating social media as their primary source of information, compared to only 55.6 % who relied on traditional media.

15. During the Tigray conflict (from November 2020 the time the conflict broke out until the peace agreement deal was made in South Africa in Novemb...bout the war? (MULTIPLE answers possible)

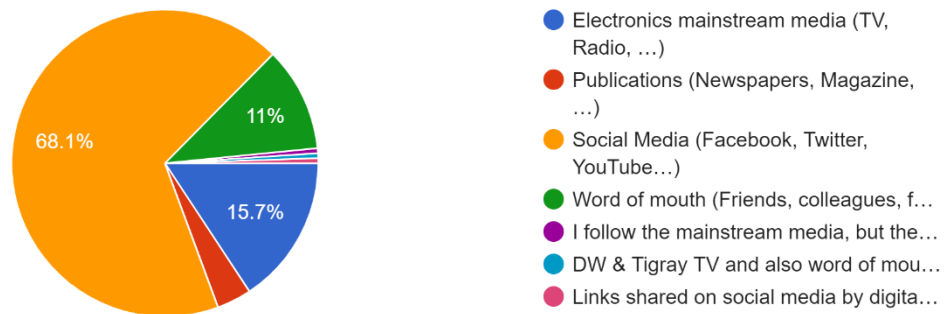
198 responses



Respondents have confirmed that they use multiple sources of information about the Tigray crisis. Electronic and print media, social media as well as an informal information from friends and colleagues have been mentioned as the source of information about the crisis. But close to 68% of the survey respondents indicated that social media outlets were their preferred source of information during the Tigray conflict compared to only 19.4% respondents who preferred electronics and print media as their main source of information about the conflict.

16. From the above platforms which was your Preferred source of information about the Tigray war?

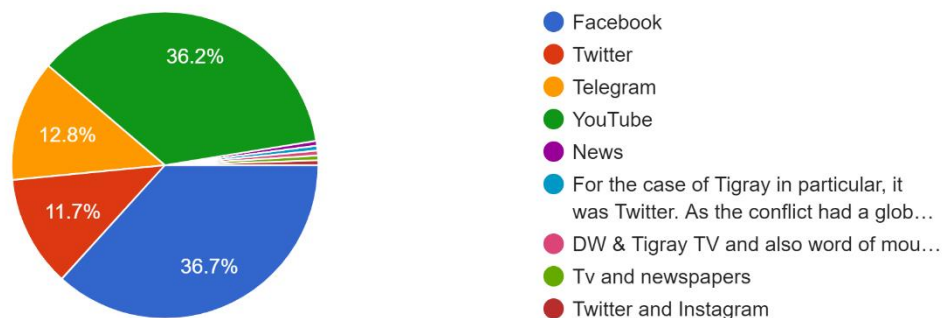
191 responses



Though respondents of the survey use a variety of social media platforms, Facebook and YouTube stand out as the platforms that provide the most information about the Tigray war getting the votes of 36.7% and 36.2% of the respondents respectively. Telegram and Twitter were identified as the second and third platforms to provide the most information about the Tigray crisis with 12.8% and 11.7% respectively.

18. Which social media provided you the MOST information about the Tigray conflict?

196 responses



All of the key informants of the study also agree that Social media has played a significant role in disseminating information and shaping public opinion during the Tigray crisis. With limited

access to traditional media outlets, social media platforms have become important sources of information for those seeking updates on the situation in Tigray.

Key Informant 3, notes that as the Ethiopian government-imposed restrictions and limited access to the Tigray region made it difficult for traditional media outlets to report on the conflict, social media became a primary source of information for many Ethiopians, the international community and even journalist. She goes on:

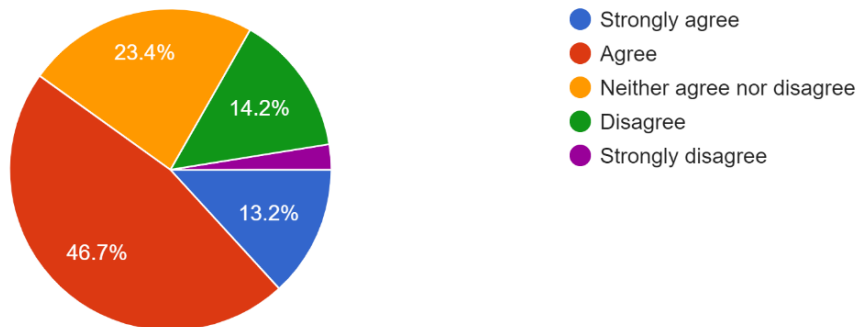
Social media played a significant role as a source of information during the Tigray war. As the Ethiopian government imposed a media blackout, social media became a vital source of information for people both inside and outside of Tigray. Many people used social media to report on the situation on the ground, posting pictures and videos of the conflict and its impact on civilians. Journalists, activists, aid workers, also used social media to share information and raise awareness about the conflict.

4.2.2. Government Social Media Outlets

From the respondents of the survey close to 70% of respondents believe that the government of Ethiopia has utilized social media for its crisis communication during the Tigray war. This simply answers the first part of the research question on government utilization of social media during the Tigray crisis. Similarly, information from the KII also confirm that Ethiopian government's use of social media for crisis communication has been a significant development in the Tigray war and it has provided the government with a powerful tool to communicate its message and manage the narrative of the conflict.

20. The government of Ethiopia has used social media platforms for information dissemination about the Tigray Crisis.

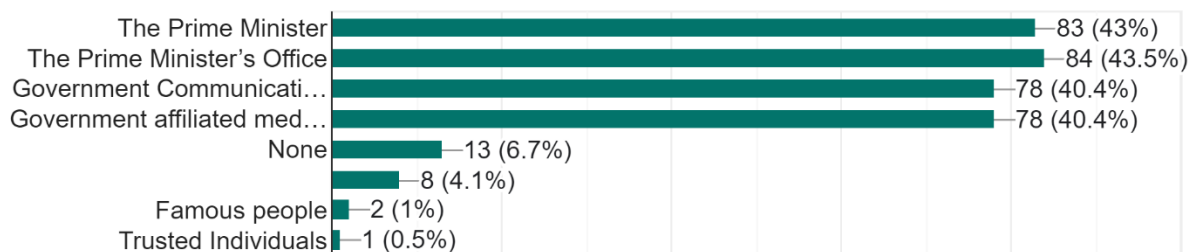
197 responses



A substantial number of survey respondents follow one or more social media outlets of the government of Ethiopia. While 83 of the 198 respondents (more than 43%) follow to the Prime Minister and The Prime Minister Office social media outlets others follow government communication Office and Government affiliated individual social media platforms. Respondents also confirm that they follow famous people and trusted individuals to get information about the Tigray crisis.

22. From government social media outlets which social media accounts did you follow? (MULTIPLE answers possible)

193 responses

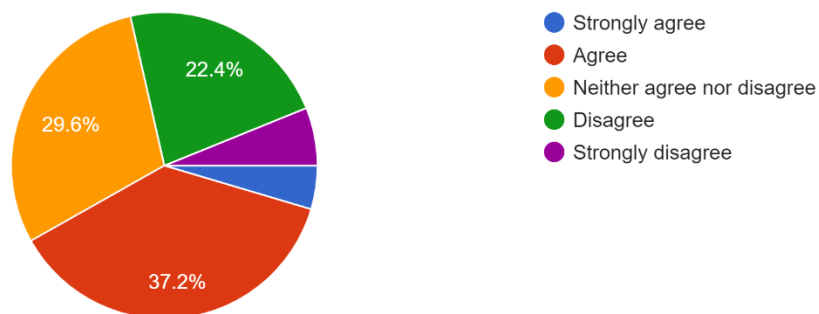


4.1.1. Social Media Complements Other Government Communications

Social media communication can complement communication through mainstream media during a crisis. While traditional media outlets such as TV, radio, and newspapers have traditionally been the primary source of information during a crisis, social media has become an increasingly important channel for crisis communication. Social media platforms can provide real-time updates, allowing governments to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to a large audience. Social media can also allow for more direct and personalized communication with the public, as people can ask questions and receive responses in real-time. However, traditional media outlets still play an important role in crisis communication. They often have a broader reach and can provide more in-depth coverage and analysis of a crisis. Additionally, traditional media outlets are often seen as more credible and trustworthy by the public, which can be important during a crisis when accurate information is essential. Therefore, a comprehensive crisis communication strategy should include both social media and traditional media channels. By using a combination of these channels, governments can reach a wider audience, provide timely and accurate information, and build trust with the public during a crisis.

27. The government social media communications complemented other communication channels (TV, Radio,...) during the Tigray Crisis.

196 responses

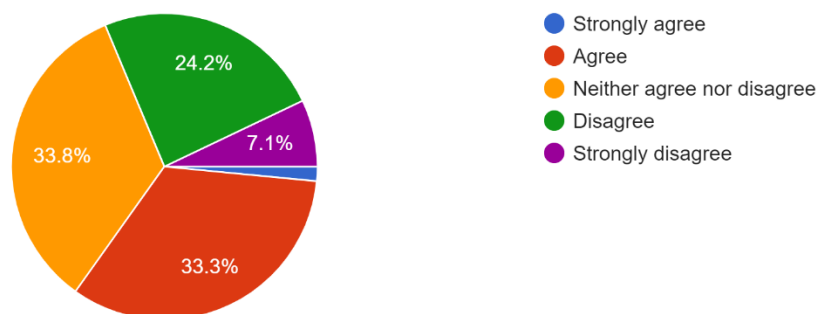


The study found out that more than 40% of respondents agree that the government social media communications complemented other communication channels (TV, Radio,) during the Tigray Crisis and close to 30% couldn't say whether government social media communication complemented the communications through traditional mainstream media.

Furthermore, the study found that over 40% of respondents agree that the government's social media messages during the Tigray crisis were aligned with other official communication channels, as well as other communications such as media briefs, press releases and news conferences. While a substantial 33.8% could not decide whether government's social media messages were aligned with other official communication channels, such as media briefs, press releases and news conferences the rest 31% disagree that government's social media messages were not aligned with other official communication channels, such as media briefs, press releases and news conferences.

35. The government's social media messages were aligned with other official communication channels, such as media briefs, press releases and news conferences.

198 responses



Similarly, information from key informant interviews indicate that governments social media communication was dependent on the mainstream media. Informant 2 says that rather than

producing contents suitable for social media government outlets share and post content produced for the mainstream media as well as share government press releases and information.

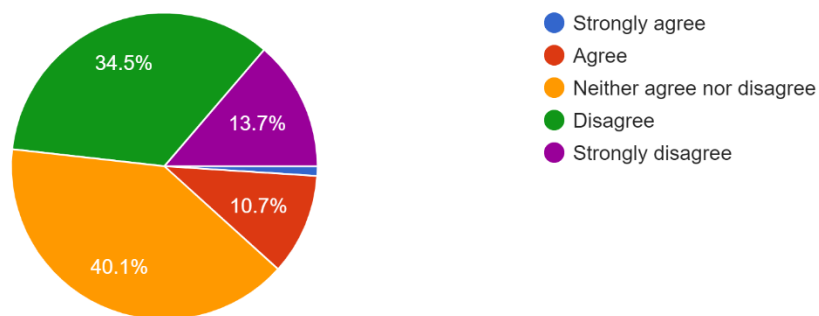
4.2. Effectiveness Of Government Social Media Communication

4.2.1. Timeliness and Reliability of Information

Around 60% of respondents of this study believe that the Government of Ethiopia has used social media to disseminate information about the Tigray crisis despite the fact that there are concerns and complains on the trustworthiness and timeliness of information it disseminated through different channels. Close to 53% of respondents also think that social media were a very important or extremely important means for the Government of Ethiopia to disseminate information about the Tigray conflict.

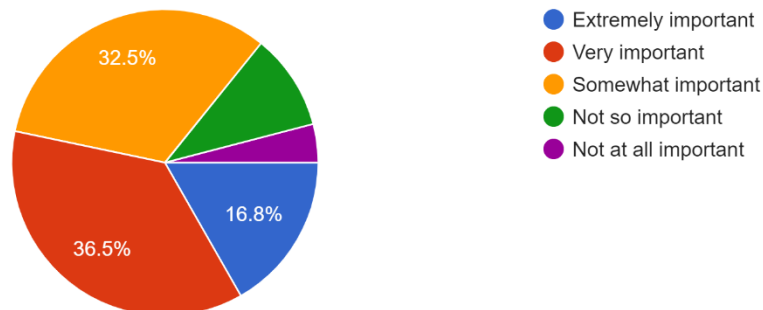
24. Information I have gotten from government and its affiliate social media platforms about the Tigray crisis were reliable and timely.

197 responses



21. How important do you consider social media were for the government of Ethiopia in disseminating crisis information about the Tigray war to the public?

197 responses



There were similar opinions from the key informant interviews of this study. Key Informant 1 details the government's use of social media during the Tigray crisis as a development as the war grows.

When the war broke out following TPLF's attack on the Northern Command of the ENDF, government's communication was poor, uncoordinated, and ineffective. The TPLF and its supporters on the other hand had a well-crafted strategy and plan where they get the upper hand in getting the international support and ensure their caused are heard. Then, it was a few nationalist Ethiopians including myself, who tried to counter TPLF's media campaign.

But later when it [the government of Ethiopia] understood the importance, Informant 1 explains it established its own campaign taskforce that include the Factcheck account and the #NoMore movement which focused on counter attaching and disputing TPLF's and its supporters claims and the international community and western media bias.

All the key informant interviewees agree that unfortunately, social media has also played a role in exacerbating hate and hostility during the Tigray conflict.

Informant 4 argues that social media platforms have been used to spread hateful and divisive messages, often targeting specific ethnic groups, and to fuel propaganda campaigns. “Social media has also been used to harass and intimidate individuals who speak out against the conflict or hold opposing views,” Informant 4 adds.

Informant 3 says both sides of the conflict have used social media to disseminate false information and propaganda, often with the intent of demonizing the other side and justifying violence against them. She concludes that this has exacerbated the already divided Ethiopian society to have a more polarized opinions surfacing radical attitudes on social media posts resulting more hatred and hostility towards those with a different opinion and resentments.

Informant 2 also agrees that the government has used social media as an important crisis communication platform.

Informant 2 argues that the government has used social media not only to disseminate its own version of the conflict but also to push back against what it sees as false or misleading information circulated by opposition parties and most notably international media outlets. This has included sharing images and videos that it claims show evidence of rebel activity or human rights abuses committed by rebel forces. The government has also used social media to highlight its own efforts to address the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, such as by sharing images and videos of aid convoys and distributing information about the number of people who have received assistance.

Informant 5, one of the key informants agrees that the Ethiopian government and its affiliates and supporters have used social media platforms extensively as part of the government crisis

communication strategy o share updates on the conflict to both domestic and international audiences during the Tigray conflict.

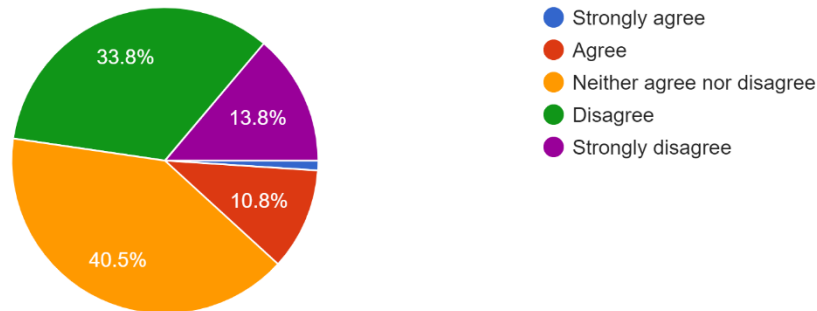
The government of Ethiopia has used social media platforms to share information about military operations, as well as to issue statements and respond to criticisms from other governments and international organizations. In addition to using social media to disseminate information, the Ethiopian government has also used it to shape public opinion and influence the narrative around the conflict.

There have been widespread concerns about the accuracy and impartiality of the information shared by the government of Ethiopia about the Tigray crisis. Information from the survey also confirmed that despite the fact that government has used social media extensively for disseminating information, the reliability and timeliness of the information is questionable.

The study confirms while 46.6% of the survey respondents think that information disseminated through the government and its affiliates and supporters were not reliable and timely, another substantial chunk of respondents, 40.5% of them couldn't say whether the information disseminated by government through social media were reliable and timely. Only 11.8% of respondents feel that the information was reliable and timely.

24. Information I have gotten from government and its affiliate social media platforms about the Tigray crisis were reliable and timely.

195 responses



The above result from the survey is also supported by information gathered through the key informant interview.

Key informants 3 and 4 strongly argue that the reliability and timeliness of information provided by the Ethiopian government during the Tigray conflict has been a subject of controversy and criticism. “The Ethiopian government has been accused of limiting access to information and suppressing critical voices, including journalists and human rights organizations,” says Informant 3. The government has been accused of limiting access to information and disseminating misleading or false information about the conflict, leading to criticism from international organizations and governments. It has also been accused of downplaying the severity of the humanitarian crisis in Tigray. International organizations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, have called for greater transparency and access to information in Tigray.

“Some critics have accused the government of spreading propaganda and misinformation, and of using social media to stifle dissent and suppress criticism of its actions.” Informant 4 says. He adds that there have been concerns about the accuracy and impartiality of the information shared

by the government on social media. The government was accused of spreading propaganda and misinformation, and of using social media to stifle dissent and suppress criticism of its actions.

Informant 3 argues that that government's censorship and restrictions on media access to the conflict zone, made it difficult for journalists and independent observers to verify the accuracy of government information.

Informant 1 also agrees that government communication strategy during the conflict wasn't proactive. "It did understand the important of providing reliable, accurate and timely information," he says. "Though this was done after the damage was already done because the proactive media campaign of TPLF and its supporters as well as the coordinated like international media campaign against the Ethiopian government, the government later was able to provide information as well as refuted misinformation and fake news against it."

The Ethiopian government has used social media, press releases, and official statements to communicate information about the conflict to both domestic and international audiences. But it was difficult if not impossible to verify the accuracy of government claims and information at the time. The government, beyond not providing enough information or withholding information has used social media and other outlets for spreading false information and propaganda. As a result, it has been difficult to determine the reliability and timeliness of government information about the Tigray conflict.

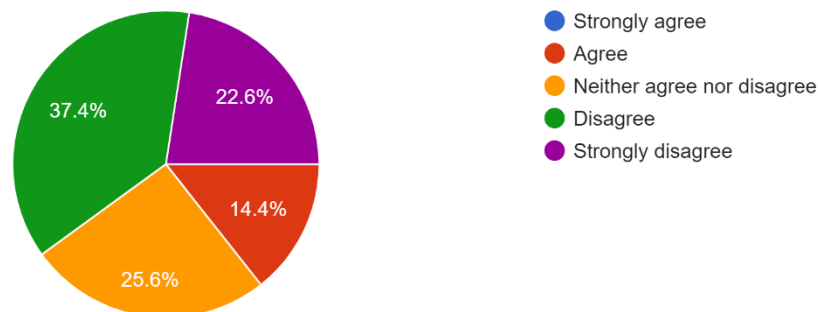
Social media has become an effective crisis communication tool due to several factors. First and foremost, social media platforms provide a fast, real-time way to disseminate information and updates to a wide audience to built trust. During a crisis, information can be shared instantly,

allowing organizations and individuals to quickly respond to changing circumstances and keep the public informed.

However, results from the survey show that more than 60% of respondents feel that government's communication didn't make them to trust government while a substantial 25.6% couldn't decide whether government communications has increased or decreased their trust.

28. You feel that government social media communications increase your level of trust in the government during the Tigray crisis.

195 responses



Informant 5 argues that the government of Ethiopia did not provide fast real-time information during the Tigray conflict, and that the information it did provide was often incomplete or unreliable. This lack of transparency and accountability has been a source of concern for many people both inside and outside of Ethiopia.

Informant 3 stresses that the government of Ethiopia has been criticized for its handling of information during the Tigray conflict, with many observers accusing it of providing limited or unreliable information to the public.

Informant 1 adds that in situations like this, it is important for governments to provide timely and accurate information to the public, including updates on the situation on the ground, the actions being taken by the government, and the impact of the conflict on civilians.

According to Informant 1, "The government of Ethiopia could have used social media platforms to clarify public requests, concerns from the public, and reassure its public about the actions it is taking to address the crisis situation." He continues, "Public participation and feedback from the public via social media could have aided the government in establishing credibility and trust with its citizens and the larger international community."

Informant 2 strengthened the above idea that by providing accurate and timely information, governments can demonstrate that they are taking the crisis seriously and are committed to addressing it. However, it is important for governments to be transparent and honest in their communication with the public. If governments are not forthcoming with information or if they are perceived to be hiding information, it can erode trust and credibility and further exacerbate the crisis.

In summary, the Ethiopian government's provision of fast and real-time information during the Tigray crisis has been a subject of criticism and controversy. The government has been accused of limiting access to information, suppressing critical voices, and disseminating misleading or false information about the conflict. Furthermore, access to information and independent observers has been restricted, making it difficult to verify the government's claims or obtain accurate and timely information about the situation on the ground. Journalists and human rights organizations have reported harassment, detention, and other forms of intimidation by government security forces. Informant 2 summarizes it as:

The government's provision of fast and real-time information during the Tigray crisis has been criticized for being limited, misleading, and suppressive of critical voices. The lack of reliable and real-time information has hindered efforts to address the humanitarian crisis and hold perpetrators accountable for human rights abuses.

Most of the key informants agree that despite the government's propaganda, it is the long years oppression of the TPLF regime that made the public seem supporting the government of Ethiopia during the Tigray war, hence one can't say the government's crisis communication were successful in building public trust.

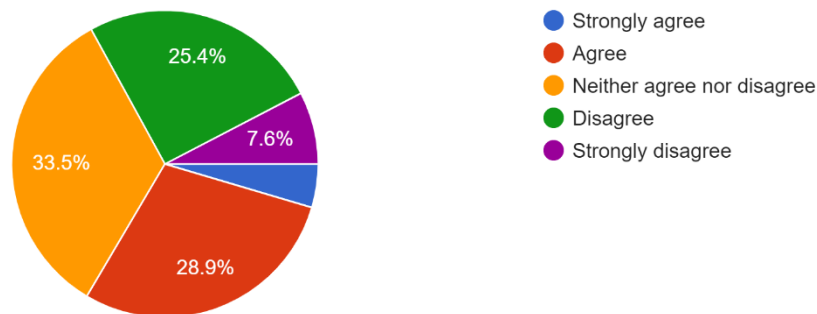
4.2.2. Appropriate Strategy and Plan

The survey question asked respondents whether they think the government's strategies to use social media to reach its public during the Tigray crisis were appropriate. The results show that there is no clear consensus on this issue

- Only 4.6% of respondents strongly agree that the government's strategies were appropriate.
- 28.9% of respondents agree that the government's strategies were appropriate.
- 35.3% of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement.
- 25.4% of respondents disagree that the government's strategies were appropriate.
- 7.5% of respondents strongly disagree that the government's strategies were appropriate.

30. You think governments strategies to use social media to reach its public during the Tigray crisis were appropriate.

197 responses



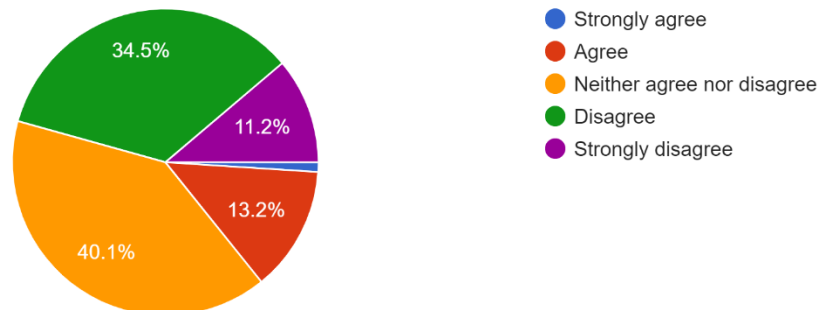
These results suggest that there is a significant minority of people who believe that the government's use of social media during the Tigray crisis was inappropriate. This is an important finding, as it suggests that the government may need to do more to improve its public relations on social media.

It is also worth noting that the largest group of respondents (35.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This suggests that many people are unsure about whether the government's use of social media was appropriate. This could be due to a lack of information about the government's strategies, or it could be since the Tigray crisis is a complex and controversial issue.

Overall, the survey results suggest that there is no clear consensus on whether the government's strategies to use social media to reach its public during the Tigray crisis were appropriate. More research is needed to understand the public's views on this issue.

38. The government had clear strategies and implementation plans to its social media crisis communication during the Tigray crisis.

197 responses

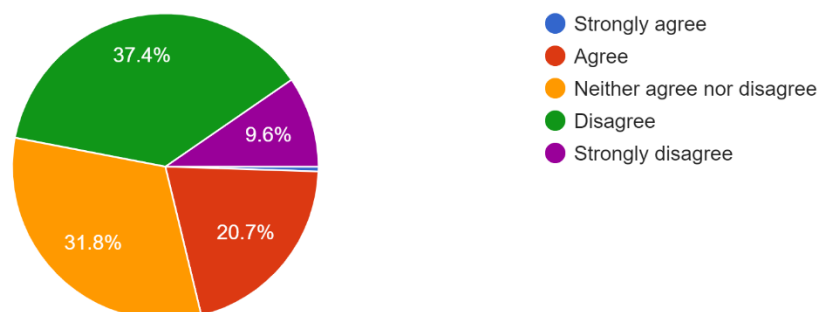


4.2.3. Clear and Concise Message

The study also aimed to assess the clarity, conciseness, and ease of understanding of the government's social media messages during the Tigray war. The gathered data indicated that only a very small portion, representing 0.5% of the respondents, strongly agreed that the messages were clear, concise, and easy to comprehend. On the other hand, 20.6% of the respondents agreed to some extent with this statement.

31. The government's social media messages were clear, concise, and easy to understand.

198 responses



A significant portion, 31.8% of the respondents, neither agreed nor disagreed, reflecting a sense

of neutrality or uncertainty regarding the clarity and conciseness of the government's social media messages. However, the survey found that a considerable majority, 37.4% of the respondents, disagreed with the statement, expressing their belief that the government's messages were not clear, concise, or easy to understand.

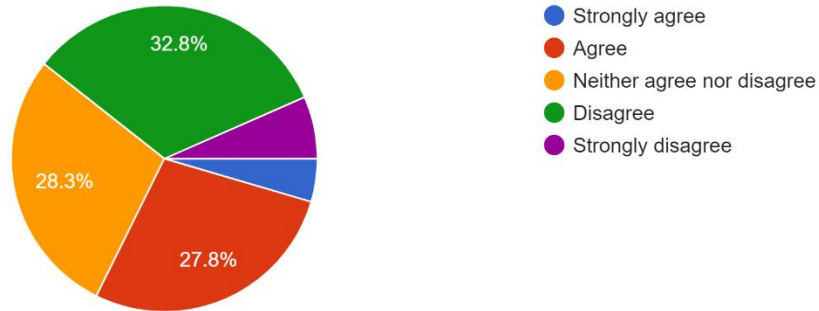
Furthermore, a notable 9.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, indicating a high level of dissatisfaction and frustration regarding the clarity of the government's social media messages during the Tigray war.

In conclusion, These findings highlight concerns about the effectiveness of the government's social media communication during the Tigray war. With a substantial portion of the population finding the messages unclear and difficult to understand, the government's efforts to inform and engage the public may have been hampered. These results suggest that there is considerable room for improvement in terms of the government's social media messaging during the Tigray war. With only a small percentage of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the clarity and ease of understanding, a significant number disagreed or strongly disagreed, highlighting the need for clearer, more concise, and easily comprehensible communication from the government.

4.2.4. Two-Way Communication

33. The government used social media to engage with the public and solicit feedback?

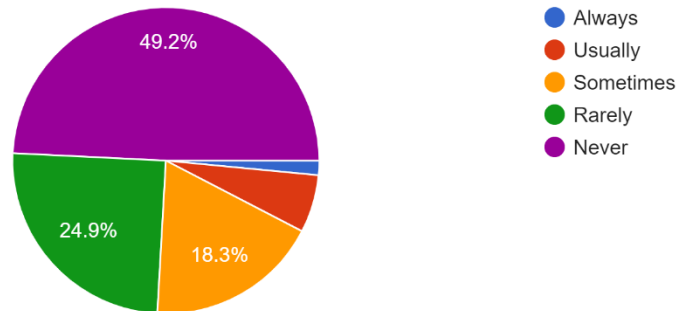
198 responses



In the age of social media, communication has become a two-way street. This presents a unique opportunity for organizations during crisis communication, enabling them to engage with their audience, respond to questions and concerns, and provide personalized assistance. By fostering open communication, organizations can build trust and credibility with the public, which is crucial during a crisis. The study revealed that nearly 40% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that government communication was engaging and solicited feedback from the public. Additionally, a substantial 28.6% of respondents couldn't say whether government communications were engaging and solicited feedback. These findings suggest that the government missed a critical opportunity to connect with the public during the crisis. By failing to engage its audience and actively seek feedback, the government may have inadvertently eroded trust and credibility.

23. How often did you react, share or comment on social media posts of government communication about the Tigray war?

197 responses



Public reaction, such as likes, shares, and comments, can be invaluable for organizations during crisis communication. These reactions provide insight into how the public is responding to the organization's messaging and actions. In the study, it was found that despite receiving information from various government and affiliated social media outlets, close to 74% of respondents rarely or never reacted, shared, or commented on government social media posts about the conflict. This low level of engagement highlights a weakness in the government's two-way communication strategy. By failing to actively engage its audience and address comments and feedback, the government has limited its ability to build trust and effectively communicate with the public during the crisis.

The Ethiopian government's communication about the Tigray conflict has been widely criticized for being one-sided and lacking in engagement with the public. Informants interviewed for this study echo this sentiment, emphasizing the government's failure to foster open and transparent dialogue with its citizens.

"The government didn't actively engage its public and provided pertinent information and clarification about the conflict at the start of the conflict," laments Informant 1. "If it had responded to public inquires and information cries well using social media platforms, it could have established an open and transparent dialogue with its citizens and built better relationships and trust."

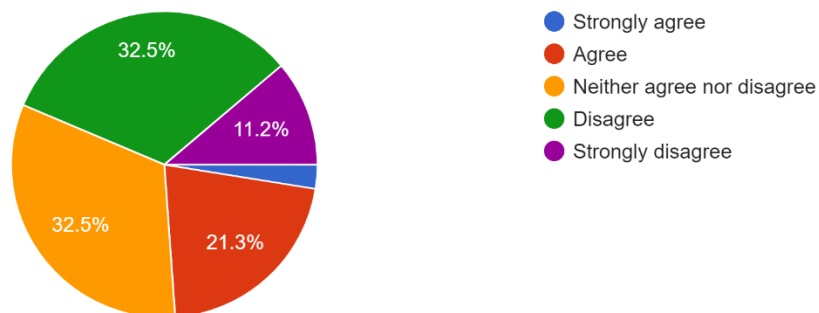
Instead of engaging directly with the public, the government primarily relied on official statements and press releases to disseminate information about the conflict. This approach failed to create a sense of open communication and left many Ethiopians feeling uninformed and distrustful of the government's narrative.

4.3. Change in Public Perception

4.3.1. Influence Public Behaviour and Action

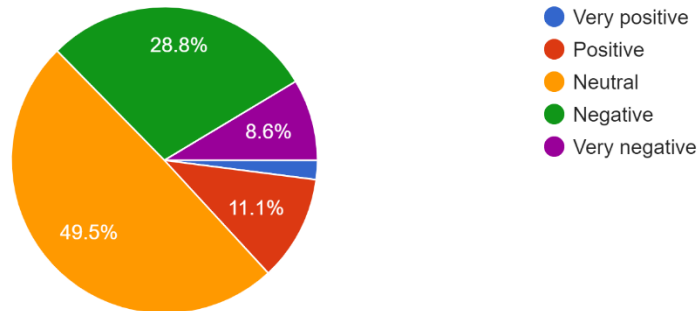
25. The government of Ethiopia social media messages help you to better understand the crisis and its impact.

197 responses



26. How does information from government social media posts influence your behavior and actions?

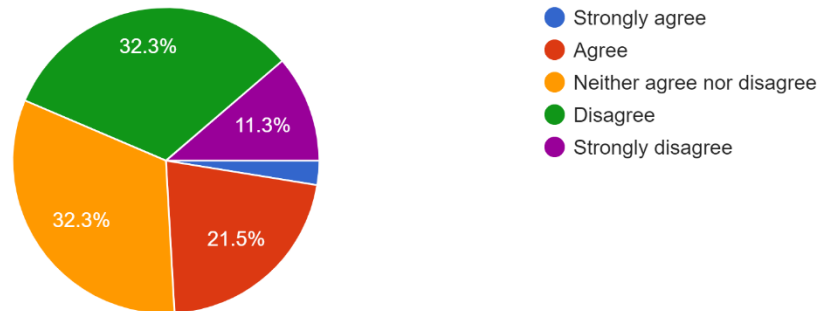
198 responses



Crisis communication can influence people's behaviour and actions. During a crisis, people often look to government and its officials for guidance and information. Effective crisis communication can help to inform and educate the public, reduce confusion and uncertainty, and encourage people to take appropriate actions. For example, during a natural disaster, government agencies may issue evacuation orders or advise people to take certain precautions to protect themselves and their property. If the messaging is clear, accurate, and timely, people are more likely to take these actions and follow the guidance provided.

25. The government of Ethiopia social media messages help you to better understand the crisis and its impact.

195 responses



On the other hand, ineffective or confusing crisis communication can lead to misunderstandings, misinformation, and inaction. If people do not understand the severity of the situation, or if they do not trust the information provided, they may be less likely to take appropriate actions.

Therefore, it is important for governments to prioritize effective crisis communication during times of crisis. This includes providing accurate and timely information, addressing people's concerns and questions, and providing clear guidance on what actions people should take to protect themselves and their communities. Effective crisis communication can help to mitigate the impact of a crisis and save lives.

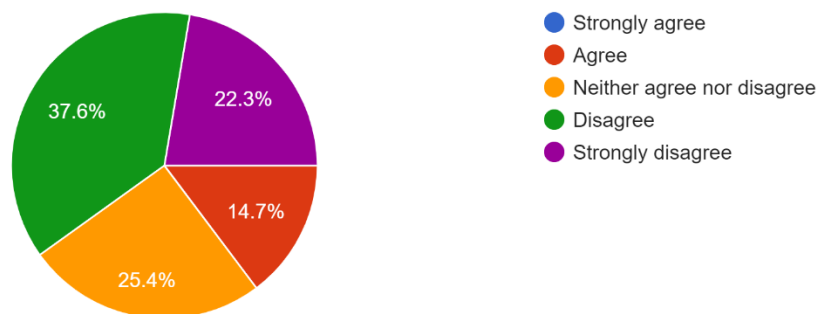
The study discloses while 43.6% of the survey respondents disagree that the government social media messages have helped them to understand the crisis and its impact a substantial 32.3% could not tell whether the government communication has helped them to understand the conflict and its impact. Only less than 14% of respondents however agree that government communication has helped them to understand the conflict and the impact.

4.3.2. Inspire Confidence and Trust

A significant majority of respondents (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that government social media communications increased their level of trust in the government during the Tigray crisis. This suggests that the government's use of social media was not effective in building trust with the public. Additionally, only 14.7% of respondents agreed that government social media communications increased their trust in the government. This suggests that the government's social media efforts were not very successful in convincing the public of its trustworthiness. The data also shows that a large number of respondents (25.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This suggests that many people were unsure of how the government's use of social media affected their trust in the government. This could be due to a number of factors, such as a lack of awareness of the government's social media activities or a lack of belief that social media can be a reliable source of information. Overall, the data suggests that the government's use of social media was not effective in building trust with the public during the Tigray crisis. The government may need to reconsider its social media strategy if it wants to use social media to build trust with the public in the future.

28. You feel that government social media communications increase your level of trust in the government during the Tigray crisis.

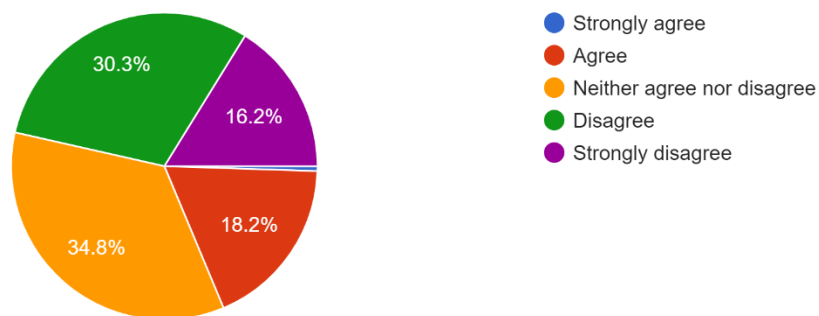
197 responses



The survey results further indicate that a majority of respondents (46.5%) either disagree or strongly disagree that the government's social media messages inspired confidence in the government's ability to manage the Tigray crisis. This suggests that the government's social media communication efforts were not effective in building public confidence in its handling of the crisis. The small percentage of respondents who strongly agreed (0.5%) with the statement further highlights the lack of confidence in the government's ability to manage the crisis as communicated through its social media messages. While a minority (18.2%) agreed with the statement, the overwhelming majority (53.5%) expressed disagreement or uncertainty. A significant proportion of respondents (34.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting that many individuals may have been unconvinced or uninformed about the government's social media messaging regarding its crisis management capabilities. Overall, the survey results underscore the challenges faced by the government in utilizing social media to inspire public confidence in its crisis management strategies during the Tigray crisis. The government's social media strategy may require a re-evaluation to enhance its effectiveness in building confidence and engaging with the public in future crisis situations.

34. The government's social media messages inspire confidence in the government's ability to manage the Tigray crisis.

198 responses



4.3.3. Public Support

Two questions in the survey were used to check the government's endeavor and success in using social media crisis communication to get the public support in needed during the war.

Table 2: Respondents opinion whether the government social media communication has garnered it public support during the Tigray crisis?

Does the government of Ethiopia used social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis?		Was the government of Ethiopia successful in using social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis?	
Response	Percentage	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	18.3%	Strongly Agree	9.4%
Agree	54.8%	Agree	36.1%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	13.7%	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	23%
Disagree	11.2%	Disagree	21.5%
Strongly Disagree	2%	Strongly Disagree	9.9%

The majority of respondents (73.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that the government used social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis. This suggests that the government's use of social media was at least somewhat effective in reaching the public and garnering their support. However, only 45.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the government was successful in using social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis. This suggests that the government's use of social media was not entirely successful in achieving its desired outcome.

The percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with both statements was 27.6%. This suggests that there is a moderate overlap between the two groups of respondents.

The percentage of respondents who agreed with the first statement but disagreed with the second statement was 27.2%. This suggests that there is a group of respondents who believe that the government used social media to get public support but did not believe that it was successful in doing so. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with the first statement but agreed with the second statement was 2.1%. This suggests that there is a small group of respondents who believe that the government was not successful in using social media to get public support but that it did manage to do so to a limited extent. The percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with the first statement (18.3%) was almost twice the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with the second statement (9.4%). This suggests that there is a stronger belief among the respondents that the government used social media to get public support than there is a belief that the government was successful in doing so. The percentage of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the second statement (31.4%) was higher than the percentage of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the first statement (13.2%). This suggests that there is a stronger belief among the respondents that the government was not successful in using social media to get public support than there is a belief that the government did not use social media to get public support at all.

The survey results suggest that the government's use of social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis was somewhat effective, but not entirely successful. The government was able to reach the public and garner their support to some extent, but it was not able to fully convince the public that it was handling the crisis effectively. Overall, effective crisis communication is essential in inspiring confidence in the government's ability to manage a crisis. By providing

timely and accurate information, being transparent and empathetic, collaborating with others, and demonstrating preparedness, the government can help reassure the public that it is managing the crisis effectively.

According to information gathered from the key informant interviews, these popular public supports have enabled the government to get the much-needed support to win the lost war. The Public support the government has gained through its public relation and propaganda work using mainly social media platform has impact at least the following important elements:

- i) **Boost the morale of the military:** the public support boosted the morale of the military and the civilian population. It helped to maintain a positive outlook and a determination to persevere despite the challenges and sacrifices of war. This has helped to overturn the tide of the war in general.
- ii) **Recruitment soldiers and militia:** Government needed badly to recruit soldiers, volunteers, and other personnel to support the war effort. The public support government gained through its propaganda public relations using social media encouraged people to join the military or take on other roles that are critical to the war effort.
- iii) **Financial and in-kind support to the war effort:** Wartime efforts can be expensive, and the government needs public support to finance the war. Citizens have contributed financial and in-kind support that have played a critical role to win the war.
- iv) **International diplomacy:** Public support have also helped the government to influence international relations and diplomacy. The #NoMore movement with strong public

support provided the government a position of strength and potentially persuade other countries to support its cause.

Before going to whether the government has been successful or not in using social media for its crisis communication during the Tigray war, let's see if the government has clear strategies and it has implemented them.

According to this study survey, 46.2% of respondents don't believe that despite the fact the government has gained public support in the war effort, it has a clear crisis communication strategy and implementation plan for the Tigray Conflict. A substantial number of respondents, 40% of them also couldn't say whether the government was following and implementing a well-crafted strategy and implementing plan in relation to the crisis communication of the Tigray conflict.

Similarly, information from key informant interviews also indicates a similar notion that government doesn't seem having a clear strategy and implementation plan of its crisis communication when the war broke out.

According to Informant 1, the government's communication at the start of the conflict, after the TPLF's attached on the ENDF's Northern Command was inadequate, disorganised, and ineffectual. "I believe the Ethiopian government did not have a clear crisis communication strategy and action plan at the start of the conflict, rather it was responding haphazardly to control damage and fighter fighting," Informant 1 says. "Even if someone claims that the government had the strategy and plan, it definitely wasn't proactive; the government didn't recognize the importance of providing reliable, real-time information about what is happening in

the field to get the public including the international community trust; and though it moved swiftly later it was too late that the damage was already done.”

A substantial 35% also couldn't say that governments social media crisis communication effort was successful. Only 21.3% of respondents agree that the government of Ethiopia's overall social media crisis communication effort was successful.

Key informant interview discussion also revealed the same result as the survey respondents.

It is not simple to make a definitive conclusion whether the government of Ethiopia was successful or not successful in its crisis communication concerning the Tigray war as opinions are very divided and subjective where you stand,” says Informant 2. Informant 3 agrees with this idea and adds:

“On one hand, the government's use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to disseminate its version of events and counter fighting TPLF's and its supporters' propaganda as well as biased or false reporting by international media outlets may have helped to shape public opinion both within Ethiopia and abroad. On the other hand, the government's social media campaign was also criticized for its heavy-handedness, including the use of bots and fake accounts to amplify pro-government messages and to attack critics of the government.”

Informant 4 adds on this that it is worth noting that the impact of social media on the Tigray conflict is difficult to measure and likely varied depending on the audience. Even though there is a consensus that social media have played a key role in forming and influencing public opinion on supporting the war efforts of the government, some segment of the society specially in Tigray

and other parts of the country don't accept the government's propaganda and relied on other sources of information. Informant 4 argues that the government's attempts to control the narrative and to suppress dissenting voices on social media ultimately backfired, as they contributed to a climate of fear and mistrust and undermined the government's credibility both domestically and internationally.”

Informant 2 concludes that ultimately, the success of the government's social media campaign during the Tigray war is likely to be a matter of interpretation and debate. All the key informant interview participants of the study also agree on this conclusion.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with the conclusions and recommendations of the study. It summarizes the main findings of the study, highlighting the most significant and impactful results and provides specific and actionable recommendations based on the findings of the study.

5.1. Conclusions

Social media platforms played a pivotal role in disseminating information about the Tigray crisis, particularly during the early stages when the government-imposed communication blackout hindered traditional media access. Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube emerged as primary sources of information for the general public, the international community, and even journalists and activists. The study found that social media platforms were preferred over traditional mainstream electronic and print media outlets during the crisis.

The Ethiopian government utilized social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to project its perspective on the conflict to both domestic and international audiences. Through these platforms, the government shared updates on military operations, contested opposition claims, and presented a counter-narrative to international media coverage. These efforts garnered much-needed public support and potentially influenced the war's trajectory.

However, concerns regarding the accuracy and impartiality of government-shared information on social media were prevalent. The study confirmed the difficulty, if not impossibility, of verifying government claims and information at the time. The government's crisis communication strategy appeared unclear and reactive, lacking a cohesive implementation plan. Moreover, the government's communication was criticized for its lack of transparency and reliability, with minimal engagement in addressing public comments or questions.

Social media also served as a tool for spreading propaganda, stifling dissent, suppressing criticism, and harassing individuals with opposing views. It exacerbated hate and hostility, fueling propaganda campaigns that spread divisive and hateful messages, often targeting specific ethnic groups.

While social media may have influenced public opinion among certain segments of the population, many in Tigray and Ethiopia as a whole remained unpersuaded by government propaganda and sought alternative information sources. The success of the government's social media campaign remains a subject of interpretation and debate.

5.2. Recommendations

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for governments to communicate with the public during a crisis. By leveraging its real-time capabilities and wide reach, governments can effectively disseminate information, engage with the public, and manage public perceptions. However, the effectiveness of social media as a crisis communication tool is contingent on the government's approach and strategy. During the Tigray war in Ethiopia, the government's use of social media for crisis communication exhibited both positive and negative aspects. While the government utilized social media to provide updates, refute opposition narratives, and present a counter-narrative to international media coverage, concerns regarding the information's accuracy, impartiality, reliability, and timeliness persisted. To enhance the effectiveness of social media as a crisis communication tool, the Ethiopian government should consider the following recommendations:

- **Establish a Clear Crisis Communication Strategy:** A pre-established crisis communication strategy outlines the government's approach to handling communication

during a crisis. This strategy should define roles, responsibilities, communication channels, and content guidelines, ensuring a cohesive and coordinated response.

- **Provide Timely and Accurate Information:** The public seeks real-time updates and accurate information during a crisis. The government should prioritize transparency and promptly disseminate accurate information, even if it is incomplete. Social media can serve as a platform for real-time updates, reassuring the public and maintaining trust.
- **Engage with the Public:** Engagement with the public through social media is crucial for building trust and fostering transparency. The government should respond to questions, address concerns, and solicit feedback from the public. This interactive approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility and enhances credibility.
- **Monitor Social Media for Misinformation:** Social media can spread rumors and misinformation rapidly, potentially undermining public trust and hindering effective crisis management. The government should monitor social media platforms to identify and address misinformation promptly. This proactive approach maintains public trust and ensures accurate information dissemination.
- **Utilize Feedback to Improve Communication:** Gathering feedback from the public is essential for refining the government's crisis communication strategy. This feedback can inform messaging adjustments, update frequency, and the use of different communication channels. By incorporating feedback, the government can enhance the effectiveness of its communication efforts.
- **Coordinate with Stakeholders:** Effective crisis communication requires collaboration among different stakeholders, including international news outlets and local journalists. Coordinating with these entities ensures consistency and accuracy of information across

all channels. Additionally, granting access to crisis areas for local and international journalists fosters transparency and credibility.

By implementing these recommendations, the Ethiopian government can harness the power of social media as a valuable tool for effective crisis communication. By prioritizing transparency, engaging with the public, and addressing misinformation, the government can build public trust, manage public perceptions, and effectively respond to crises in the future.

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Annex 1- Survey Questions

Survey Questionnaire

The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War

A thesis for the partial fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Public Relations and Strategic Communications, School of Journalism and Communications, Addis Ababa University.

P.S. Any information you provide will be solely used for this thesis and will not be shared to anyone. Your identity is also completely anonymous and confidential. Thank you for the support in advance.

A. Personal Detail

1. Name of the respondent (Optional)

2. Profession/job/Occupation

3. What age group do you belong to?

1. 18-29
2. 30-45
3. 45-55
4. 56-65
5. above 65

4. What is your gender?

1. Female
2. Male

5. What is your highest education level?

1. High school completed
2. Diploma
3. Degree
4. Master's degree and above
5. Others: _____

6. Respondents' employer

1. Government
2. Private Business
3. Self employed
4. NGO
5. Others: _____

B. Social Media Use

7. Do you use any social media platforms?
 1. Yes
 2. No
8. Which social media platforms do you use? MULTIPLE answers possible.
 1. Facebook
 2. Twitter
 3. Telegram
 4. YouTube
 5. Others: _____
9. Which social media platforms do you use the MOST? (MULTIPLE answers possible).
 1. Facebook
 2. Twitter
 3. Telegram
 4. YouTube
 5. Others: _____
10. What type of content do you prefer on your social media? (MULTIPLE answers possible).
 1. Political news and analysis
 2. Social and entertainment
 3. Business
 4. Health and lifestyle
 5. Others: _____
11. How do you prefer your social media content formats? (MULTIPLE answers possible).
 1. Written content/blogs
 2. Photos
 3. Videos
 4. Memes
 5. Others: _____
12. How often do you check in to your social media accounts in any given week?
 1. Everyday
 2. Every other day
 3. Twice a day
 4. Once a week
 5. Others: _____
13. On an average how much time do you spend on social media per day?
 1. Less than 30 minutes
 2. 30 minutes – 1 hour
 3. 1-2 hours
 4. 2-3 hours
 5. More than 3 hours

14. What is your go-to device to access your social media feed? (MULTIPLE answers possible).
1. Mobile
 2. Tablet
 3. Laptop
 4. Desktop
 5. Others: _____

C. The Role of Social Media in Government Crisis Communication about the Tigray War

15. During the Tigray conflict (from November 2020 when the conflict broke out until the peace agreement deal was made in South Africa in November 2022) what was your main source of information about the war? (MULTIPLE answers possible).
1. Electronics mainstream media (TV, Radio, ...)
 2. Publications (Newspapers, Magazine, ...)
 3. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube...)
 4. Word of mouth (Friends, colleagues, family)
 5. Others: _____
16. From the above platforms which was your Preferred source of information about the Tigray war?
1. Electronics mainstream media (TV, Radio, ...)
 2. Publications (Newspapers, Magazine, ...)
 3. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube...)
 4. Word of mouth (Friends, colleagues, family)
 5. Others: _____
17. Which social media provided you information about the Tigray conflict. (Multiple answers possible.)
1. Facebook
 2. Twitter
 3. Telegram
 4. YouTube
 5. Others: _____
18. Which social media provided you the MOST information about the Tigray conflict?
1. Facebook
 2. Twitter
 3. Telegram
 4. YouTube
 5. Others: _____
19. The information I have gotten from social media about the Tigray crisis were reliable and timely.

1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
20. The government of Ethiopia has used social media platforms for information dissemination about the Tigray Crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
21. How important do you consider social media were for the government of Ethiopia in disseminating crisis information about the Tigray war to the public?
1. Extremely important
 2. Very important
 3. Somewhat important
 4. Not so important
 5. Not at all important
22. From government social media outlets which social media accounts did you follow?
(Multiple answers possible)
1. The Prime Minister
 2. The Prime Minister's Office
 3. Government Communication Office
 4. Government affiliated media and supporters
 5. Other:

D. The Effectiveness of Social Media in Government Crisis Communications During the Tigray War

23. How often did you react, share or comment on social media posts of government communication about the Tigray war?
1. Always
 2. Usually
 3. Sometimes
 4. Rarely
 5. Never
24. Information I have gotten from government and its affiliate social media platforms about the Tigray crisis were reliable and timely.
1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
25. The government of Ethiopia social media messages help you to better understand the crisis and its impact.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
26. How does information from government social media posts influence your behavior and actions?
1. Very positive
 2. Positive
 3. Neutral
 4. Negative
 5. Very negative
27. The government social media communications complemented other communication channels (TV, Radio,) during the Tigray Crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
28. You feel that government social media communications increase your level of trust in the government during the Tigray crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
29. You trusted information posted by official sources (such as government agencies) more or less than information posted by regular people on social media during the Tigray.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

30. The governments strategies to use social media to reach its public during the Tigray crisis were appropriate.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

31. The government's social media messages were clear, concise, and easy to understand.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

32. The government used social media to combat misinformation and rumours during the Tigray crisis.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

33. The government used social media to engage with the public and solicit feedback?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

34. The government's social media messages inspire confidence in the government's ability to manage the Tigray crisis.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

35. The government's social media messages were aligned with other official communication channels, such as media briefs, press releases and news conferences.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
36. The government used social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
37. The government was successful in using social media to get public support during the Tigray crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
38. The government had clear strategies and implementation plans to its social media crisis communication during the Tigray crisis.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree
39. The government social media crisis communications during the Tigray war were legally and ethically appropriate.
1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree

40. Overall, the government's use of social media for crisis communication during the Tigray crisis was effective.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Annex 2- Survey Responses



Survey%20Responses%20198%20Responses

Annex 3 - Key Informant Interview Questions

Key Informant Interview (KII) Springboard Questions

The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: The Case of the Government of Ethiopia during the Tigray War

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1. How do you evaluate the Government of Ethiopia's crisis communication during the Tigray war (from strategic planning and execution perspective)?

2. How do you characterize the government's use of social media for crisis communication (from type of social media, reliable and timely information, contents and frequency of information sharing)?

3. How do you evaluate the public perception in getting information and updates from social media specially that of government social media outlets how it reacted?

4. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of social media for the government of Ethiopia's crisis communication during the Tigray conflict from transparency and accountability perspective as well as in getting public support?

5. What challenges have you observed in the government crisis communication of the Tigray war?

