



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

**Management and Usage of Facebook Platform by Public Relation
Practitioners: Ministry of Health in Focus**

By: Hayat Fentaw Adem

Advisor: Samson Mekonnen (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.

September 8, 2023

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DECLARATION

I the undersigned, declare that this study, titled, "*Management and Usage of Facebook Platform by Public Relation Practitioners: Ministry of Health in Focus*" 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: Hayat Fentaw Adem

Signature_____

Date: September 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: Samson Mekonen

Signature:_____

Date:_____

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Hayat Fentaw entitled- *Management and Usage of Social Media Platform by Public Relation practitioners: Ministry of Health in Focus*, is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of Master of Arts in Public Relation and Strategic Communication, complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Approved by the Board of Examiners:

_____	_____	_____
Advisor	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Examiner	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Examiner	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Department Chair	Signature	Date

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List of Acronyms

COVID	Corona Virus Disease
EPHI	Ethiopian Public Health Institute
MoH	Ministry of Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
PR	Public Relation
SoE	State of Emergency
WHO	World Health Organization
PHEM	Public Health Emergency Management
SMCC	Social Media Crisis Communication Model

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess how the Ministry of Health's public relation department manage and use Facebook platform during COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative research approach was used. In-depth interviews conducted with communication professionals selected purposefully from the Ministry of Health. Messages posted between April 9, 2020 to July 7, 2020 on the Facebook page of the ministry also collected and analyzed. The social media integrated theory model as well as Content theory also used to evaluate the contents posted on MoH's Facebook page. Ministry of Health used different approaches including three message presentation formats, designing content message that would increase public awareness regarding the pandemic as well as the ministry slightly used Facebook Boosters. However, some of messages presented through these mechanisms lacks skill that needed to develop or write for social media. In addition, the Facebook page managed without any or very little interaction with the public. Many Scholars including Garcia's social media integration theory affirm that lack of engagement with public believed to reduce to the audience number and effectiveness of the page. However, the MoH's Facebook page has exhibited different performance without public engagement. The page has able to gain millions of followers, which used to be ten thousand before the pandemic. Therefore, the researcher concluded that circumstances and the privileged given to the ministry has enabled it garner millions of followers.

1 CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The advancement of technology in communication shapes people's daily life and organizations communication platforms as well as style. Due to the dynamics of the digital era, organizations are referring to alternative sources of information and/or turning their face from the conventional one-way print and broadcast media to the interactive internet-based online media outlets to conduct their public relation tasks. According to sources, social media platforms have generated massive attention and usage among several other internet-based outlets.

Applying Social media platforms for public relations practice in an organization may not be only advantageous; it has also drawbacks depending on the management of the platform. Social media has opened up new possibilities and raised many questions for public relations practitioners and academics. In the world of perpetually connected publics, is public relations to be a dark art that spins (or tweets) the truth for credulous publics? Or is this the time to conceptualize public relations under the full glare of the Internet and the expectations of increasingly powerful publics? These questions speak to both the continuing relevance and ethical basis of public relations. Answering them depends upon our better understanding of the fundamental shifts that social media has brought. Such analysis also must be cautious to examine actual changes in practices and influences, and not merely get caught up in designer or practitioner promotions of what social media are and can accomplish. (Motion et al, 2016)

Lovejoy et al (2012) argued that social media had a huge impact not only on people but also on brands across industries as they devise strategies to engage their audiences and win their loyalty (Nigussie, 2019). The same scholars also asserted that social media or social networking, such as Facebook, has afforded organizations the opportunity of engaging their stakeholders in real-time communication and information exchange.

The researcher supports this argument as she has notably observed the increased presence and engagement of business brands, public/government institutions and humanitarian /nongovernmental organizations in many of the existing social media platforms.

According to Tesfaye (2013), the phenomenon of social media and social networking has been happening in Ethiopia. From the young to adult, from scholar to ordinary public has engaged in the social media and social networking activity. And he argued that this engagement in social networking sites changed many aspects of citizens' communication and relationship in Ethiopia

Following the covid-19 pandemic phenomena, social media has become more ideal platform to communicate the larger public across the world. Particularly the platform has considered as enabler to practice one of the precautions to minimize the pandemic- avoiding physical contact.

As institution, in charge of managing issues related to the pandemic Ethiopian Ministry of Health has been also engaged in using the platform to disseminate information. Following the outbreak, the ministry has developed Risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy to bring the necessary behavioral change across the larger public and pertinent stakeholders. The strategic communication specifically focused, in empowering individuals, families, and communities to adopt preventive and health seeking behaviors. (EPHI, MOH, 2020)

The ministry issues daily reports, prevention methods, cautions, and any related information through different mediums. Among the mediums social media considered as an important platform by Risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy (RCC), particularly to address the urban population. The platform has been given greater focus by considering the growing number of mobile phone users, which most of them engage on social media. Out of the social media dominantly the communication task has been conducted through Facebook and Twitter.

This overall situation is unique and different for the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, in fact the same is true for country as a whole. Ethiopian Ministry of Health has never face pandemic in more than three decades time. Plus, the outbreak of COVID-19 has happened where the world is engaged in different form of communication platform (social media). Unlike the traditional media the newly evolved social media has different features. Particularly the social media is a phenomenon that inculcates media convergence (text, audio and video). Therefore, the platform requires different operation mechanism and different approach as well as skills to compose messages.

Therefore, the researcher believes examining which and how social media has been used as well as analyzing contents from the platforms are worthy to be studied.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

According to Wubareg (2019), social media have provided multiple channels for public relations practitioners to engage their publics directly without relying on traditional media. The public relations practitioners have opportunities to share real-time updates on the activities of their organizations and receive immediate feedback from their publics.

The role of social media in public health has been a topic of interest in recent years. According to Rohman, (2017) found that social media has the potential to modify health behavior, but the estimation of this change in the long-term lies outside the scope of social media health campaigns. While Roland (2017) asserts that using social media for health promotion campaign increasing. However, he reiterates the need to evaluate the approaches used to change health behavior, rather than only creating awareness.

Ghahramani et al, and his fellow scholars (2022) as they try to evaluate the impact of social media in health promotion campaigns towards behavior change, they found that Facebook and YouTube were used more for intervention purposes to change health behavior, while Twitter and Instagram were used more to observe the trend of changes in health behavior. The study also found that the employed measures usually target immediate behavior or social media engagement rather than addressing the change on a behavioral level. The study indicated that social media enables to focus on widespread ways of reaching the target audience.

Social media played a crucial role in disseminating information and combating misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Tang et al, 2020) The World Health Organization (WHO) found that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the response measures are accompanied by abundant information, and it is difficult to find reliable sources and reliable guidance.

Rohman, (2017) identified some potential limitations policymakers may wish to consider when using social media for health communication. These include lack of reliability, confidentiality, and privacy, overload of information, and the dissemination of false information and analysis.

When it comes to the local experience, there are studies examining recent efforts of using social media platforms as a PR tool among organizations and PR practitioners in Ethiopia. In more

specified topic Tegegne et al., (2022) examined the use of social media among Ethiopian health professionals for COVID-19 related information. Tegegne and his fellow researcher concluded that more than half of the health professionals had good usage of social media for COVID-19-related information. They farther stated that being young, having computer training and skill, and perceived usefulness contribute to social media usage for COVID-19 information. According to this study providing basic computer training, having internet access in the workplace, and emphasizing the usefulness of social media are important to utilize social media for COVID-19-related information.

Research conducted by Dawit (2019) on the challenges of using social media among 213 PR practitioners working for federal government organizations in Addis Ababa uncovered that 98 % of participants of the research are using social media, and most of them prefer Facebook over other social media platforms. The findings presented a list of challenges while using social media including, lack of skilled human power, insufficient attention given by top management, internet connection and electric interruptions, poor ICT infrastructure, fake organizational pages, shortage of information and limited knowledge to maneuver the social media platforms.

Another study assessed the impact of social media during the lockdown in Ethiopia revealed that social media can have a significant impact on the spread of panic about the COVID-19 pandemic which in turn leads to a negative impact on people's psychological and mental health. (Lelisho et al., 2023) The study also found a positive correlation between social media use and the spread of fear about COVID-19. During the lockdown, respondents used social media to interact with friends and family, as well as to stay informed about the pandemic. The study suggested that the impact of social media on people's fear levels varies depending on age and gender.

According to the authors the governments and other relevant organizations should work together to provide people reliable information. Moreover, to minimize the negative impact of the platform the recommended action against people with large followers who spread misinformation.

Dawit, despite providing evidence on the challenges PR practitioners facing regarding social media, his thesis does not demonstrate the mechanism needed to manage the dynamic social media

platform particularly organization's social media page. The thesis also mentioned two theoretical frameworks (Media Ecology Theory and Social Penetration Theory) which it failed to analyze the PR professionals' activities to create impact through the platform.

The social media is one of the media that has been easing the task of public relations practitioners. Not only eases the task of the professionals, the social media has grown in to an indispensable communication platform. Social media are digital tool and applications that facilitate interactive communication and context exchange among and between the audiences and organization.

Now a day almost all governmental and non-governmental institutions in Ethiopia uses social media. These emerging developments in social media similarly require new ways of thinking and operation since the platform is different from the traditional media. This new media's interactive features are attracting billions of users across the world. The engagement of this amount of audience makes the platform the ideal mode of communication to address the public at large. This has been the case during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Health authorities, including World Health Organization were active user of social media to inform the public about the epidemics.

Ethiopian ministry of health also used the new media to forward preventive approach against the pandemic. As a result, the ministry designed a communication and public engagement strategy focused on prevention methods. The strategy used almost all available channels including the social media to forward its message to minimize the number of infected individuals. The ministry issues daily reports, prevention methods, cautions, and any related information through social media.

There are many studies conducted on social media usage for COVID-related information worldwide. Furthermore, findings revealed that issues such as a lack of access to digitized health information, low perception of social media usefulness, and lack of internet/Wi-Fi and electronic device, which all contribute to what is impeding social media platform. However, there is a limited evidences on how social media platforms are managed and how contents are designed for the platforms in Ethiopia. Particularly when it comes to situations like corona pandemic it is certainly important to study.

According to social media integration theory the multi-layer features of the social media is active platform to disseminate information in short time among large number of people. Similarly, the theory states that active engagement in managing specific social media will increase public engagement. Beyond active management, contents are important to ensure effective communication on social media according to social media content theory. Therefore, this study will investigate how the three communication network components (Exposure, Public engagement/Feedback and Connection) employed on the official Facebook account of MoH. The study will also analyze contents posted on social media by the ministry. Beyond contents, the study will examine effectiveness of the communication strategy set in place.

1.3.Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to investigate how the four communication network components employed on the official Facebook account of Ministry of Health.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the Study

1. Investigate how the Ministry of Health used its official Facebook page to create connection among users to enable transfer information about COVID-19.
2. Analyze mechanisms employed by the ministry to ensure the exposure of contents posted about COVID-19 on its official Facebook page.
3. Explore the approach employed by the ministry to engage with the public on its official Facebook page.
4. Analyze the contents message posted about COVID-19 pandemic on the Ministry's official Facebook page.

1.4.Research Questions

1. How did the Ministry of Health manage its official Facebook page to create connection among users to intensify information transfer about COVID-19?
2. What are the mechanisms used to increase the exposure of contents on its Facebook page?
3. What approaches being employed by the ministry to enhance public engagement across its Facebook page?
4. What are the types of contents posted about COVID-19 by the Ministry?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Given the growing interest in using social media as a PR tool in Ethiopia, this study has the potential contribution to give an insight to understand how social media can be used as a PR tool in public organizations. In addition, this research will help to get an understanding of how Ministry of Health used/ utilized social media as a PR tool.

As new phenomena the social media platforms have brought features that would help to communicate with the mass instantly. To utilize effectively this opportunity, one should understand how the platforms work. This research would help to fix the knowledge gap in this regard.

The results of this work may serve as an input to improve the social media strategies and activities of the Ministry of Health as well as other government organizations that use social media to communicate the mass. More importantly it can be used as an input if the phenomena like COVID-19 could happen again. The research outcome may also benefit researchers, academicians, scientific societies and policymakers as a source and it encourage further studies in the area.

1.6. Scope of the Study

Though there are many public organizations in Ethiopia that are using social media platforms as a public relations tool, this research only focuses on the social media activities of the Ethiopian Ministry of Health. This is because the Ministry of Health is public organizations that is in charge of public health, which is delicate matter considering COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the context of the pandemic requires dissemination of quality and accessible information through available mechanism, which includes social media.

Structurally the MoH has linked to each region's health bureaus. Nevertheless, the study targeted to address the social media activities of the organization at the head office in Addis Ababa. The reasons for this are accessibility of sources of information and availability of respondents who are directly involved in the social media activities of the organization.

Among other PR tools, this study investigates the MoH's social media and management by stressing its PR activities on the platform of Facebook. Additionally, this study is limited to

qualitatively analyzing selected social media messages from the MoH's Facebook platforms published in the time frame of three months (April 9, 2020, to July7, 2020). Analysis is only limited to covering messages only related toCOVID-19.

Since the study limited its scope to the case of the MoH, some of the findings may not represent the general aspect of the use of social media as a PR tool among other public organizations in Ethiopia.

1.7.Limitations of the Study

The study used the qualitative method research, and an in-depth interview only conducted with the head of the MoH's communication department and experts in charge of administering social media outlets of the organization at the headquarters.

Regardless of the evidence mentioned by the respondents, this work does not include feedback from those who follow the ministry's Facebook page. The inclusion of those data would have been able us to effectively measure the achievement of the ministry's Facebook.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

This chapter presents relevant discussions by different scholars and sources about the concept of social media, social media as a PR tool, growing trends of internet and social media use in Ethiopia, the concept of health emergency, risk communication and health emergency.

2. Overview of Ministry of Health

Ethiopia is a country rich in diverse cultures, traditions, and histories, like many others in sub-Saharan Africa. While Ethiopia has ancient civilizations, is the only country on the continent not colonized, and is the oldest territorially integral nation in the world, it is one of the least developed countries in the world. In terms of infrastructure and professionals, Ethiopia's health care system is very weak. The Country's primary health coverage has shown 90% increment in 2000, however the universal health coverage remained 43%. (MoH 2020)

Ethiopian Ministry of Health provides and regulates a comprehensive package of preventive, curative, and rehabilitative health services as a means to promote health and well-being. In addition to developing policies and guidelines for the sector, the Ministry determines intervention priorities, as well as securing funding.

There were 353 functioning hospitals, 3,753 health centers and 17,550 health posts serving the population in 2020. According to the ministry's website at the end of Ethiopian fiscal year 2012, there were 273,601 healthcare workers working in public health facilities, of which 181,872 (66.5%) were healthcare professionals and the remaining 91,723 (33.5%) were administrative/support staff. In terms of health professionals to population ratio, one doctor serves 9,979 people, 1 nurse for 1,705 and one midwife for 5,491 people. More than 40,000 extension workers also provide community health services at more than 17,000 health stations. (MoH 2020)

According to NHA Ethiopia's per capita health expenditure is 33.2 USD. (NHA 2017) From the total health expenditure, the government covers 32%, 31% is from out-of-pocket expenditure and 35% is from development partners.

2.1.MOH Public Health Intervention

Public health intervention in Ethiopia focuses on prevention-oriented public health policy. The Ministry of Health (MOH) utilizing Health Extension Workers under the Health Extension Program (HEWs) carries out the intervention. This program serves as a framework for providing primary healthcare through continuous public health education (Assefa et al., 2019).

Ethiopia has achieved most of the MDGs for health with extraordinary performance, earning it respect on a global scale (Assefa et al., 2017). According to research on health extension programs in the country, health extension workers are crucial to a primary health care system that works smoothly (MERQ, 2019).

For both urban and rural contexts, no well-established health communication initiatives exist. This demonstrates the lack of knowledge, expertise, and research surrounding the function of communication in public health. According to the international body for health, WHO (WHO, 2011), Ethiopia looks to fall into the category of nations in Sub-Saharan Africa where effective health communication techniques have mostly been disregarded.

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Ethiopia has achieved most of the MDGs for health with extraordinary performance, earning it respect on a global scale (Assefa et al., 2017). According to a recent study on the Health Extension Program in Ethiopia, health extension workers are crucial to a primary health care system that works smoothly (MERQ, 2019).

Though public health intervention has shown improvement, more has yet to be done. One of the drawbacks is that the majority of public health intervention initiatives follow a top-down structure that hinders community involvement.

2.2.COVID-19 in Ethiopia

It is the Chinese Wuhan city that reported the first Novel Coronavirus in December 2019. The World Health Organization defined it as COVID-19 disease (Srivastava et al., 2019). The disease has affected 213 nations. The number of infected individuals and the death toll were rising daily. It killed more people than SARS in 2002. The WHO declared the 2019 Novel Coronavirus outbreak a Public Health Emergency and a Global Concern in January 2020. The WHO suggested that nations adopt standardized measures and actions to combat the consequences of the infections.

The Director of WHO declared the virus a worldwide pandemic on March 11, 2020, because to its rapid transmission and risk. 22 million cases were reported on August 20, 2020. (WHO, 2020) Many things were unclear because the virus is new.

There are numerous cases and fatalities reported from Ethiopia. As of March 8, 2023, more than 500 000 cases have been reported. Given that there have been reports of the case from all over the nation, an increase is predicted (MOH, 2023).

2.2.1. Ethiopia's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

The government has strengthened its preparedness and response efforts to combat COVID-19 and has established a national system for coordination of preparedness and response through an Emergency Operation Center. The Ethiopian government has also established four levels of coordination: the National Disaster Risk Management Council, which is run by the deputy prime minister's office. Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM), which includes a multi-sectorial national task force; the PHEM technical taskforce, which is run by the Director-General of Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI); and the PHEM Technical Working Group, which is run by the national disaster risk management council. As of March 31, 2020, the Emergency Coordination Center had established national and regional task groups in all regions to coordinate COVID-19 humanitarian efforts. (Zikargae, 2020)

2.2.2. Early Response

Numerous risk communication and community involvement strategies utilized in public health during the early outbreak. The Media has been engulfed by the messages that encourage hygiene practices that can possibly reduce the pandemic's transmission. There were also customized

messages through ethiotelecom to enforce hygiene practices. All educational systems were closed for many months as part of the early responses. Exceptionally postgraduate continued with virtual learning, (Zikargae, 2020).

Furthermore, following the case report, the Ethiopian government implemented strict contact tracing, mandatory quarantine, and treatment. The university's dormitories and other public buildings turned into quarantine centers. Further isolation facilities, totaling 15,000 beds, were also built from scratch. Front-line healthcare professionals were also provided life insurance by the government. (Zikargae, 2020)

A wide range of actions have been taken after the first case reported in Ethiopia to stop the spread of COVID. As things get very tight the government declared a state of emergency on April 8.

2.2.3. Risk Communication and the Social Media

In response to the pandemic Ethiopia has developed a Risk Communication and Community Engagement strategy (RCCE). The goal of the strategy is to enable the community to adopt the preventive practices at different levels, so as to slow the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. It is believed to improve knowledge, perception, self-efficacy, and health-seeking behaviors. (EPHI, MOH, 2020)

The strategic objective of the documents emphasized on assessing perception toward risk and intensifying public as well as institutions engagement in combating the pandemic. Besides, the strategy also targeted to address rumor and misinformation by producing content in different formats.

The strategic efforts in public health have focused on raising public awareness and educating the public. Some even believe that the opposite, which is uncertainty coupled with good communication can help pandemic containment. In regards to the effects and dangers of COVID-19, prime minister Abiy Ahmed has made public statements. (EPHI, MOH, 2020)

Early in February 2020, Ethiopian media started to cover the COVID-19 epidemic more broadly. This coverage peaked in March, with the WHO's declaration of the pandemic level and the 13th March 2020 confirmation of the first case report in Ethiopia (Deressa et al., 2020).

Since then, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) have provided daily updates to the public via radio and television regarding the pandemic situation in the nation. Additionally, they have issued daily updates on the COVID-19 situation as well as various risk communication and awareness-raising messages on their websites, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts. Ethio-telecom has been employing mobile phone ring tones as part of a media campaign to inform all individuals.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, and websites to combat COVID-19. The MOH and EPHI found that people used social media moderately to get information about COVID-19 and to interact with their friends. The platforms allowed people to express their feelings and needs, and to listen to the feelings and needs of others. (Yemer et al., 2021)

The MOH and EPHI also used social media to send medical information to create awareness about COVID-19. They used the platforms to combat misinformation and to provide accurate information about the virus. Yemer and his fellow researchers criticized the two institutions for politicizing the messages. The MOH and EPHI also used social media to suggest features to control the spread of COVID-19, particularly the preventive ones.

These preventive messages typically emphasize on frequently washing hands with soap and water, wearing a mask, and taking the necessary steps to distance oneself from others, such as spending as much time as possible at home, avoiding close contact with others, including shaking hands, and avoiding crowds and large gatherings. However, acceptance of these health preventative activities by the public during epidemics depends on public confidence in government and media information (Zikargae, 2020).

New cases have persisted to arise despite efforts to scale up public health campaigns to stop the corona virus from spreading throughout Ethiopia. Every region of the nation has experienced rapid coronavirus expansion, and local community transmission has been formed.

2.2.4. Impact of COVID-19 in Ethiopia

The crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa coupled with quick decline in global conditions and the battle with the pandemic have resulted socioeconomic disaster. Not even Ethiopia has been spared. (UN, 2020)

The socioeconomic conditions in Ethiopia have significantly changed as a result of COVID-19. After global movement hampered by COVID-19 pandemic, Ethiopian economy has been in many challenges.

Global disruptions have had a significant influence on COVID-19, affecting tourism, the hotel industry, exports and imports, as well as remittances to the nation. Remittances, household consumption and economic growth dropped. Rising debt risk coupled with high inflation rate, and business and tourism were suffering. (Alemayehu , 2021)

According to study by the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on Ethiopia's economic activities, with specific negative consequences on employment during the beginning of the epidemic. In the early stages of the epidemic, employment rates drastically decreased, according to data. Metropolitan areas were especially badly impacted. For example, according to the estimation of the Ethiopian Job Creation Commission, the country has lost 14% job in the service sector alone due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Harris et al., 2021).

Inequalities in access to distant learning possibilities during school closure, particularly between rural and urban populations, higher- and lower-income households, and girls and boys, have been widened by the epidemic. It's also likely that the amount of time girls has available for remote learning has decreased due to increased pressure on them to care for younger siblings and assist with home tasks (UN, 2020).

In connection with the impact of the pandemic social media contributed both positively and negatively. Social media has been used extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic for crisis updates, peer interaction, and emotional support. It has been a valuable tool for staying informed and connected during a time of isolation and uncertainty. However, it is important to be aware of the potential risks of using social media during a crisis. (Volkmer, 2021) Social media can be a breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation. Which in turn exacerbate the negative impact of the pandemic. In some of country misinformation has led to racism and communal

conflict. As in the global this situation is true for Ethiopia. Spreading wrong information about traditional medicines and spiritual healing were spreading across social media. (EPHI, MOH, 2020)

2.3.The Concept of Social Media

Social media is a term used to describe the various forms of online communication and interaction that have become increasingly popular in recent years. It includes websites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and many others. Social media has become an integral part of our lives. It has also become an important tool for business, providing a platform to reach potential customers and build relationships with the existing ones. (Broadband, 2023)

The concept of social media can be traced back to early forms of internet communication such as Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), which were developed in the late 1970s. From there, technologies such as Usenet (1979) and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) (1988) allowed users to engage in real-time conversations with one another over the internet. The development of web 2.0 technologies in the mid-2000s further opened up opportunities for users to create and share content online, leading to the emergence of social networking sites such as MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006). These sites enabled users easily connect with friends, family members and colleagues from around the world by creating profiles that included photos, videos and status updates. (Shah, 2016)

Impacting society, negatively or positively is an innate feature of social media platforms. On the positive side, it has allowed people to connect with each other in ways that were not possible before. People can now share their thoughts, feelings and experiences with a much larger audience than ever before. (Zhu, Hwang, Xu, & Lin, 2018) The advantage of using social media as a source of information is argued that social media provides access to a wider range of information including news, opinions and personal opinions. This has allowed people to increase their awareness and understanding of different cultures and perspectives.

On the negative side, social media has been linked to a variety of mental health issues. This is because people often compare themselves to others on social media, leading to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017) It also argued that social media could be

unreliable as it is often difficult to verify the accuracy of information shared. Plus, that social media can be used to spread false information which can be led to confusion and misinformation. Furthermore, it is argued that social media can be used to spread hate speech and other forms of disinformation. These are aspects that put social media at two different extreme points. (Broadband, 2023)

2.3.1. Features of Social Media

The internet has revolutionized the way people interact and work together. According to, White the internet has also changed the mechanism relationship has been created and maintained. Social media is a variety of applications that reinforce or amplify such online social networks. (White C. m., 2012)

Links between individuals, groups, or pieces of information are referred to as social networks. These objects could be messages, images, videos, wall posts, notifications, live activities, widgets, etc. As stated by White "Such links may be created by users or by intelligent agents. (White et al.,2009). Particularly social media has attracted and supported a sizable population of users who have transferred some of their offline social networks online.

Scholars identified a number of key features of social media that contribute to its success and popularity. According to Harvey (2014), all social media involve some sort of digital platform, whether mobile or stationary. Not everything that is digital, however, is necessarily social media. According to Harvey, allowing users to participate and interact are two common characteristics that help to define social media. (Couldry, 2012)

The ability to create and share content is one of the key aspects of the social media platform. These enable users to express themselves and share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences with others. Apart from written items, multimedia is content that can be shared across the platforms. This feature has been found to be particularly beneficial for businesses and institutions, as it allows them to promote their products and services to a wider audience.

On the other hand, (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012) stated a number of distinctive characteristics of social media, which make it much more powerful than the traditional media. The capability to be connected with others is another key feature of the platform that allows users to build relationships

with people from all over the world, regardless of geographical boundaries. It also enables users to join groups and participate in conversations about topics of interest. This feature has been found to be particularly beneficial for networking and building professional relationships. Users can also create a unique profile that reflects their interests and personality. The new media is also a place where people can access information quickly and easily. This particular feature has enabled users to stay informed and keep up with current events. (Hanalon & Tuten, 2014)

A wide range of services such as online shopping and entertainment are also available across the platform.

2.3.2. Types of Social Media

According to Aichner, Grünfelder, and Maurer (2021), the phrase "social media" was first uttered in 1994 in a Tokyo online media environment known as Matisse. These researchers further suggest that the initial social media networks emerged during this period. As the types and quantity of social media, platforms have grown, so has their functionality and complexity. This advancement of features has established social media as an influential force over the past couple of decades.

Based on what they can do, Foreman (2017) listed the following social media type. The list will be discussed as follow: -

- **Social networks:** sometimes called “relationship networks,” this type of network enables interaction between individuals and organizations or among people. The connected entities share information, news and ideas. help people and organizations (brands) connect online to share information, news and ideas.
- **Media sharing networks:** this is where people share their photos or videos as well connect with each other through live video. Organizations can do the same to promote brands.
- **Discussion forums:** are one of the archaic kinds of social media. People join these networks to find, discuss, and share news, information, and opinions. One kind find here what most people are talking about. Users are anonymous so there are possibilities to find genuine and real expressions and opinions. Reddit and Digg fall under this category.
- **Bookmarking and content creation networks:** this is where people find trending topics and those who present topics. Creativity and inspiration would flourish in this category of network. Examples are Pinterest and Flipboard.

- **Consumer review networks:** this is where people share their experience about specific items, services, or brands. This is helpful for consumers as well as tourists. In this network people share and review details of information including price, facilities, quality...of an item or a place. (Yelp, Zomato)
- **Blogging and publishing networks:** give people and brands tools to publish content online in formats that encourage discovery, sharing, and commenting. This category ranges between the oldest word press to micro blogging.

According Dao (2014) Social Networking Sites (SNS) are the most popular type of social media and allow users to connect with one another via a virtual network. Popular Social Networking Sites examples include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. Among these Facebook is the most popular social media across the globe.

2.3.3. Facebook

Facebook is a social networking service owned by Meta Platforms. It is the world's largest social media platform, with over 2.91 billion monthly active users as of December 31, 2021. Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, along with fellow Harvard College students and roommates Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, in February 2004. The founders initially launched Facebook from their dormitory rooms at Harvard College. Since then, the company has expanded rapidly and now has offices in over 60 countries. (Helmond & Nieborg, 2019)

Facebook has had a profound impact on the world, both positive and negative. On the one hand, it has connected people from all over the world and made it easier to stay in touch with friends and family. It has also been a powerful tool for social change, allowing people to organize and mobilize around important issues. The platform also allows users to create and manage pages for businesses, organizations, and public figures. (Illing & Wagner, 2019)

Some biggest revolutions in the world have gained strength because of Facebook. The Arab spring in West Asia and revolution in Ukraine are the important events worth to mention. Facebook has also helped politicians seize power. In the 2016 US elections, the Trump campaign sent out 50,000 different messages in a day. Tweaking each one depending on how people reacted. Andrew

Bosworth, a close friend of Mark Zuckerberg, once claimed that the company was responsible for Trump getting elected. (Illing & Wagner, 2019)

Facebook has been criticized for its handling of user data, its role in the spread of misinformation, and its impact on mental health. However, the platform remains popular among users around the world. On the other hand, Facebook has also been criticized for its role in the spread of misinformation and hate speech, and for its impact on mental health.

Facebook is a powerful tool that can be used for good or for bad. It can be used to connect with friends and family, to share news and information, and to build communities. However, it can also be used to spread misinformation, to bully and harass others, and to invade people's privacy.

2.3.4. Using Facebook During Crisis

Crises are intricate in nature, have disproportionate impacts and can progress at varying speeds. By taking advantage of the features of Facebook tools, organizations can significantly increase their capacity to show resilience in response to crises by creating new avenues for collaboration to help build more communities that are resilient over time. For instance, at the start of a crisis, crisis managers and responders to help identify the source and intensity of the crisis and disseminate a consistent message from Facebook and other social networks. As search, links and other pertinent resources are tagged and evaluated based on recommendations by people on the sites. Simultaneously crisis managers can search and gather information, so they can respond effectively.

Facebook tools can also be used to enhance a community's ability to anticipate and prepare for a crisis. For example, collaborative projects may be initiated on Facebook platform to empower interested stakeholders by providing reliable information that could support intervention opportunities during a crisis. Crisis managers can also monitor content communities to identify emerging trends and potential hotspots that could become flashpoints for crises.

Nevertheless, according to (Chan, 2016) for organizations to be successful in utilizing social media tools for crisis management there is a need to shift paradigm across seven areas.

A. Purpose. Before the emergence of social media tools, the use of the internet was mainly limited to informational purposes. With social media tools including Facebook, people can now share

content. However, to effectively utilize the advantage of Facebook tools, one need to exert more effort. Particularly being creative and interactive is crucial to engage people.

B. Care Activity. Effective handling of a crisis depends on the ability of crisis managers to gather accurate information on the changing environment and needs of affected populations. To generate actionable knowledge, knowing and understanding Facebook tools are helpful to make informed decision on time.

C. Stakeholders. Unlike the old times government has less control over information. So, collecting information from Facebook and transmitting to wider audience requires to deal with multiple parties. This include NGOS and individual citizens. Facebook tools allow us to undertake crowdsourcing, as a means of gathering a variety of perspectives on existing challenges as well as innovative and effective solutions to enhance the management of crises;

D. Information Content. The analysis and decision making can be quite complex. The focus on discrete data alone, may not be sufficient to generate useful insights for responders. Facebook and other social media capabilities can help crisis managers to understand emerging issues and the emerging effects;

E. Treatment of Information. Concerns about privacy, security, and data confidentiality can often lead to decisions to reduce the scope.

Studies have found that Facebook and other social media platforms (Malik, Mahmood, & Islam, 2021) (Lin & Wang, 2020) (Chen, Liang, & Cai, 2018) (Alexander, 2013) (Lin, Lachlan, & Spence, 2016) (Babajide, 2013) (Zhao, Yin, & Song, 2016) can be used to quickly disseminate information to large numbers of people, allowing for faster response times and more effective coordination of relief efforts (Kumar et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2018). Social media can also be used to provide support to those affected by disasters, such as providing emotional support, offering advice, and connecting people with resources (Kumar et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2018).

The negative outcome of social media during the crisis has also been examined by various studies. For example, some studies have found that social media can spread misinformation, leading to confusion and panic (Kumar et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2018). Additionally, social media can be

used to spread hate speech and other forms of discrimination, which can further complicate relief efforts (Kumar et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2018).

Overall, social media can be a powerful tool for communication during times of crisis. It can be used to quickly disseminate information, facilitate relief efforts, and provide support to those affected by disasters. However, it is important to be aware of the potential drawbacks of using social media during crisis, such as the spread of misinformation and hate speech

2.3.5. COVID-19 and Facebook

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way we interact and communicate. One of the biggest beneficiaries of this new reality is social media. As the world is forced to rely on digital platforms to stay connected, social media has become increasingly essential for keeping us informed and entertained.

People frequently use several different platforms. Where people go for COVID-19 news and updates has changed due to the virus's quick global spread. According to a recent study that examined media consumption patterns throughout the pandemic, 40% more people now get their news from social media than they did before COVID-19 (Havas Media, 2020). Overall, it plays a pivotal role in shaping how people across the globe are experiencing the pandemic.

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking platforms. Prior to COVID-19, Facebook had already been well-recognized for sharing all kinds of information including personal (Lin & Wang, 2020) political (Hasell & Weeks, 2016), professional, health and crisis-related information (Chen, Liang, & Cai, 2018). In extreme events (e.g. Japan tsunami, Katrina hurricane, terrorist attacks in Paris, and Arab Spring), Facebook and other social networking sites have shown great potential for improvising, transmitting, and disseminating information more easily, speedily, and broadly than mainstream media (Alexander, 2013).

Although concerns about the quality of information have been raised (Osatuyi, 2013) Facebook and other social media platform create fertile ground for rumor refuting, identifying misinformation, and spotting fake news. The COVID-19 health crisis highlights the particular strengths of this media as a powerful tool for social interaction, and for seeking and sharing accurate as well as fake information about the disease (i.e. symptoms, transmission patterns, and

medical interventions). Despite the fact that it is heavily used for sharing information during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is little understanding of how and why people share information on Facebook during this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made many individuals socially distant from one another, resulting in a surge of social media use. Social media outlets like Facebook have provided a platform for individuals to stay connected and stay informed about the latest news about the virus (Fowler et al., 2020). This form of virtual connection has also allowed for global participation, as people from all over the world are able to contribute and learn from each other. During the pandemic, local and governments have invited citizen participation via Facebook and other social media, allowing people to report areas with the highest blockage of movement, levels of panic and allocation of resources used to control infection. (Cruikshank et al., 2020). Facebook has enabled an unprecedented level of public engagement in the fight against the virus and has reinforced the idea that a crisis of this magnitude requires global collaboration (Fowler et al., 2020).

Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, were also used to alert people of the risks of the virus, inform them of precautionary measures, and manage rumors (Li & Liu, 2022). This highlights the importance of social media including Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic as it allowed for a continuing flow of information and helped reduce isolation.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how social media has become part of many people's daily lives. However, it is also evident that there are ways in which social media is not the most effective tool for disseminating information about the pandemic. For example, Facebook has been criticized for the spread of false news regarding the virus.

Furthermore, due to the global nature of the pandemic, using social media to transmit highly localized information may not be the most effective strategy to provide effective recommendations or warnings due to a lack of accuracy (Horst & Murthy). For example, Twitter users in the United States often have difficulty referencing resources related to the pandemic in other countries due to language or cultural barriers (Horst & Murthy, 2018). Overall, while social media can be a useful tool, it is not consistently effective in disseminating pandemic-specific information.

2.4.Social Media Contents

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a correlation can be drawn between how the Corona virus spreads and how social media content becomes viral. Just as the virus spreads among communities, so too is social media a tremendously powerful tool for spreading information instantly worldwide, irrespective of its veracity.

The number of likes and shares obtained on various social media channels is a key measure of virility. As demonstrated by Kim (2018), a message with high shares and likes resulted in a greater perception of its influence on others. Social networks such as Twitter, one of the most popular, had 353 million active users in January 2021. Twitter's model of likes and tweet-retweets generates a cascade effect that allows any type of information to go viral. (Hauer & Sood, 2020)

Information stored on social networking sites gradually presents itself in richer forms due to developments in media. To add richness, this content uses text as well as images, videos, and hyperlinks. Researchers are investigating how information richness draws users' attention and the effects that information richness has on user behavior online. In order to inform citizens, debunk rumors, and ease public anxiety during the COVID-19 crisis, government social media accounts produced a large number of messages in various formats, including simple text, photographs, and videos. (Estela et al., 2022)

Many researchers have identified the type of information on social media as a key element in people's engagement and effective communication. By looking at the tweets of three American health groups on Twitter, Park et al. found that personal health-related information and actions earned more shares and likes. In a similar vein, Manetti et al. (2017) examined the content of 35 transportation businesses' Facebook posts and Twitter tweets in Canada and the United States and discovered that posts displaying entertainment and other auxiliary activities earned the most likes. This impact also applies during times of crisis (Wei et al., 2022).

Meltzer et al. (2018) examined the Facebook posts made by 37 emergency management groups in Romania during times of crisis and discovered that viewers were particularly interested in negative news, rescue stories, an individual or group's accomplishments, and crisis education.

Nowadays, there is also an increase in social media users, and these platforms create a different context in terms of user willingness to respond, unlike other traditional media. Furthermore, in the

context of the COVID-19 pandemic, surveys conducted globally suggest that the lockdown and social distancing measures have generated new or heightened emotional states in the form of greater psychological distress in people's daily lives (Brooks et al., 2020), resulting in an increased sense of sadness and other negative emotions. Moreover, chronic stress related to COVID-19 and its emotional corollaries (anxiety, anger, and fear of death) is particularly high in society (Droit-Volet et al., 2020). Very recent studies on Twitter posts during 2020 reveal that negative emotions, such as anger and sadness, were dominant during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Lwin et al., 2020).

Landi et al. (2021) examined the theme of Facebook posts published during the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy, the UK, and New Zealand. According to their findings, posts expressing gratitude for medical professionals received more likes than usual, and posts about government action garnered many comments.

2.5.Types of Social Media Content about COVID-19

The Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform (SSHAP) has identified four types of COVID-19 related contents that has been circulating across social media. Some the categories and their formats have evolved in connection with social media advancement.

Factual Information: On their websites and social media pages, officials and professional organizations, national governments, and online news outlets publish accurate and recent information about COVID-19, including details on case counts, containment efforts, vaccine and treatment development, and public health advice. These informational resources are frequently used. In addition, people repackage and disseminate verified factual information in convenient formats. Posts on online forums like Reddit and on individual social media accounts can also be used to disseminate factual information. They can incorporate larger personal issues and accounts of the current situation in addition to health facts.

Incomplete or Biased Information: Although not always accurate, this kind of information may be deceptive. It contains outdated or irrelevant information that might lead to rumors, stress, and misunderstanding. For instance, back in February 2020 University of Southampton published research predicting where people from Wuhan, where the virus originated, had travelled to in the

two weeks before the city went into quarantine lockdown. The researchers posted a series of messages about their work on Twitter, including a decade old map illustrating global air travel. Nevertheless, the post did not explain the map was not part of the study. Several Australian news outlets picked the map and reported the red lines on the map; represent five million Wuhan residents who fled the city. Similarly, it has also appeared in the online editions of the Sun, Daily Mail and Metro. An unbalanced view of what is happening might also result from an inclination to sensationalize situations. Information that is biased is frequently connected to political agendas and may be linked to stigma and xenophobia.

Humors Content: these contents are amusing or sarcastic; they are not meant to be taken seriously. People attempt to lessen the seriousness of a situation or to ease the tension. According to some studies, the very same content can create chaos or escalate the already existing bias.

Misinformation and Disinformation: Before being disproved, false and misleading information concerning COVID-19 is frequently disseminated throughout several media outlets. For instance, it has been suggested that COVID-19 was designed as a bio-weapon or that it was produced in order to profit from vaccines. Unsubstantiated information also delivered concerning prevention, transmission as well treatment of the pandemic.

Many programs have been created to disprove false information spreading online, such as the World Health Organization's "myth busters".

Misinforming Contents: the rate at which the scientific community is learning about COVID-19 as well as personal protective measures has created a need for regular, easily accessible, up-to-date and accurate information. The dramatic changes in our daily lives have had an enormous impact on our behaviors including where we turn for news. As the scientific community learns more, there is a dire need to be able to disseminate information immediately; social media provides a platform that can facilitate this.

On March 27th, António Guterres, the Secretary General of the World Health Organization, posted on Twitter, “Our common enemy is #COVID-19, but our enemy is also an ‘infodemic’ of misinformation. To overcome the #coronavirus, we need to urgently promote facts and science” (United Nations, 2020).

Spinoza and Rene Descartes explained how people process information. For Descartes information processed after a few moments of exposure. Spinoza countered Descartes' by espousing that people accept all information they are exposed to as truth and verify it or reject it in a subsequent process (University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School of Communication, 2017).

Major events across the world such as 9/11, Ebola, zika are led the people to believe or reject conspiracy theories or misinformation. Studies found that conspiracy ideation is an important indication whether a person accepts or rejects misinformation. (Klofstad et al., 2019)

While studying how online miss-informers and their content acquire influence, Mikhailov (2020) categorized the online community who compete against established authority or experts in to three. Mikhailov characterized the first group as advanced alternative sources of knowledge production; while they may not always align with established authorities, they always make an effort to get the facts correct. The community of Wikipedia editors serves as the best example.

Another group of communities categorized as activists since they view information sharing as a means rather than a goal by itself. This second type of group occasionally makes sincere endeavors to develop new knowledge, but they may also spread false information deliberately or unintentionally if it can serve as a more effective strategy to realize their goal.

The third category of online communities has emerged and come into sharp focus during the last five and more years. They are essentially internet "fronts" or "shells" for covert actions taken by state actors and non-state actors.

These three online groups frequently collaborate and cooperate in creating a complex network in cyberspace. They are all connected by how well they challenge established authorities or experts online. Beyond all comprehending how these networks are created, develop, and gain power requires a great deal of effort. According Mikhailov it is important to identify the deference between these entities so the public can make informed judgments. He further argues some of these online groups need to be exposed and dismantled, while others need to be engaged with and made into potentially strong allies.

2.6. Defining Public Relation

Tench and Weddington (2009) noted that Public Relations (PR) used in a huge range of industries and each one requires different skills and competencies among practitioners. As the applicability of Public Relation widens across various sectors, scholars also try to define the concept of PR from different perspectives. Similar to the concept of social media, as observed by the researcher, scholars have tried to provide mostly descriptive definitions.

According to McKie and Sriramesh (2017), PR is better described than defined. And they proposed the following elaborated description of PR:

It is an applied professional practice and an academic field, and both offer communication centered and research-based ways to understand, inform and intervene to adjust relationships between ideas, individuals, groups, and societies. The practice seeks to influence the building, maintenance, and restoration (or, on occasion, destruction) of reputations and also to integrate different perspectives and groups, particularly through its enactment of activities such as issues management, crisis resolution, and risk communication. Because the field's major arena of social action is the public sphere, especially in media (online and offline), politics and public opinion, public relations activities can impact significantly on democracy.

The above description by McKie and Sriramesh (2017) recognized PR as a profession and an academic field, which is using research as a road map for guiding relationships. The description underlined the important role of PR in building, maintaining and restoring reputations as well as in integrating a diversity of views and groups that is leading to the proper implementation of democracy. Particularly PR has meaningful impact in managing reputation during crisis time. This includes whether keeping the existing reputation or building additional one.

Harlow (1976) cited by Tench and Yeomans (2009) has reviewed more than 472 definitions confined between 1900 and 1976, then he came up with the following definition of PR.

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; defines and

emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change; serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (p.5).

In his definition, Harlow wanted to show PR as an important and independent management function that would help generate new and existing two-way communication as well as understanding and maintain acceptance and collaboration with organizations and audiences. Researchers have also learned from the definition that PR can play a role in managing problems or crises that may affect an organization's reputation.

The role of public relations in assisting management or decision makers in an organization is further mentioned in Harlow's definition. Therefore, PR helps in three directions. Primarily, it reminds management to understand and respond to public opinions and interests. Second, it supports organizational change through a mentoring, educational and advisory role. Third, by referring to experiences and creating possible scenarios, public relations can systematically help in anticipating the consequences of administrative actions and the possible reaction of people. It is important to pay attention to such a definition that public relations use research methods for the scientific study of its activities. Professional ethics is another important pillar in performing public relations.

Similarly, White and Mazur (1996: 11) give a definition based on the objectives of public relations: "to influence the behavior of groups of people in relation to each other". Influence must be achieved by communicating with different audiences of the company.

Practical definitions of PR are often based on the realities of everyday work, often replacing the term "public relations" with other terms such as organizational communication or corporate communication, which often include persuasion (Grunig 1992; Hutton 1999) and influence. Grunig, and Dozier (2006) acknowledge that many practitioners still associate PR with media relations, although some recognize its potential as a management function to foster public interaction. It could be argued that this kind of flexibility means that practitioners try to explain what their work really means.

In 1978, the first General Assembly of the World Public Relations Association in Mexico defined PR as "the art and society of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, advising organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action that benefit both the organization, as well as the general public (Newsom et al. 2000:2). The definition as defined by the Public Relations Society of America in 1988 is equally broad. "Public communication helps organizations and audiences reconcile" (Public Relations Society of America 2004).

2.6.1. Facebook as a Public Relations Tool

The Internet and digitization in a broad sense are changing the nature of public relations, as they have altered human life styles. The practice of public relations in organizations has undergone enormous changes because of the tools it uses. Thanks to the internet, public relations professionals no longer rely on traditional media to communicate with target groups (Gulerman and Apaydin, 2017).

Digital tools such as websites and emails are replacing traditional printed tools such as annual reports and press releases. Some experts suggest that new tools such as social media have greater potential to promote brand awareness, corporate reputation, and customer service (Gellerman & Apaidin, 2017). Social media provides public relations professionals with ample opportunities to interact with the public using new technologies and integrate them into everyday activities.

In discussing social media's purpose, Freberg et al. (2003) argue that social media allows individuals or organizations to communicate and share information with each other, which can help to create a virtual community. Additionally, organizations can use social media to monitor and listen to the opinions of their key stakeholders. In other words, social media can contribute to organizational PR activities through information sharing, feedback management, environmental scanning, and social media story monitoring. Facebook is popular for doing so.

It has become vital that social media campaigns, particularly Facebook campaigns, are proactively managed by public relations professionals, particularly during crises. It is much easier for professionals in this field to measure the effectiveness of a Facebook campaign than a traditional one. As followers respond to new posts, the platforms deliver near-real-time results.

For effective management of the impact of the platforms on public relations during times of crisis, tone and timing are important. According to Souhail (2015), the new media is where traditional PR tools have transformed into new formats of interactive content. Public relations' main tool for decades, the press release, can be adapted into a video, a presentation, or a series of posts and status updates. PR professionals can also effectively use Facebook for events. Platforms such as Facebook provide instant and easy ways to communicate with audiences.

As stated by Souhail (2015), social media participation improves the brand perception and overall image of organizations and businesses. In addition to publishing relevant news about the company, blogging about topics that matter to the audience and sharing that on social media helps PR maintain contact with current customers and attract new ones. By attracting more followers, you get more readers for your news, thereby increasing its relevance and reaching your target audience.

Digital PR has the potential to directly persuade customers by answering their questions, providing more information to them, and explaining to them, especially when they are dissatisfied with the organization's products and services, according to Tang and Joo (2016). In addition to disseminating information, it leverages the power of journalism networks to communicate updates regarding its organization's services.

As more and more people use the internet and as many start blogging themselves, PR releases can be easily picked up and posted by bloggers and online journalists. In this way, PR news can reach a wider audience and get a wider reach. To summarize, social media keeps your company in the public eye, keeping it up-to-date and in touch with potential customers (Vitis PR, 2019).

2.7.Theoretical Framework

2.7.1. The Social Media-Integration-Theory-Model

The social media integration theory model has four communication network components. (1) Connecting; (2) Feedback; (3) Sharing; and (4) Exposure. This theory explains why social media has so many more features than traditional media. In this theory, communication is interaction back and forth, or it is two ways. It has multiple layers of duplicating content that enable high-

speed communication. Garcia (2010) revealed that “social media” integration is an interactive process. It let the audience access similar information. The communication stays with the audience for a long time, which is important to create brand engagement. In this model, users create a social media ecosystem by placing content.

These contents were then circulated among connected people, groups, associations, etc. After this, social networking platforms help connect with the public and improve the engagement approach caused by the “two-way street” simultaneous interaction process called the full-duplex communication mode. Further, Garcia (2010) also indicates social recommendation; reviews are the driving forces of engagement. The online conversation on social networks results in giving valuable feedback or experience about the services, information, etc.

According to Aneela Muzaffar, this theory is related to the social media crisis communication model (SMCC), which plays a role in the communication of crises today. This model involves the influential who spread the information that is perceived by other people, the followers who access that information, and the inactive members who are not accessing the information directly through social media but receive it through other sources. (Muzraffar, 2019) The essential component of this model is the circulation of information through social media and between mass media and social media. This model explains the useful communication in the risk situation as it is the fastest means of spreading the information, keeping in mind that for the inactive followers, the information reaches them through the active followers (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2012).

2.7.2. The four Components of Social Media-Integration-Theory-Model

Exposure

High and multi-layer exposure of specific content comes from the ability to create something unexpected; developing and presenting content in a way that has an impact and catches audience attention. Virility, or exposure, belongs to people outside your circle of influence. The value of creating a post that has an impact is that one should do something out of the ordinary that would draw someone’s attention, anyone outside the people involved in the project: managing to amaze someone beyond our understanding of amazement (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Social media users anticipate that authenticity and truth claims will be matched by creative, engaging, and amusing communication (Livingstone, 2008; Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Couldry, 2012). Social media creative output frequently stems from or constitutes popular culture. The guiding principles of popular culture indicate a desire for "the everyday, the intimate, the immediate." Jenkins et al., 2002, p. These may not be usual public relations issues, but as Jenkins (2006) suggests, social media has brought this layer of cultural creation to the forefront, and cultural and social competences for public relations in social media must be reconsidered.

Working within the nexus of popular culture and social media, or what Jenkins (2006) refers to as a "participatory culture," affords opportunities for new identities, meanings, and collaborative practices. Social media is an ideal space for what Callon et al. (2001/2009) refer to as a "dialogic democracy" in which citizens not only participate but also identify, weigh up, and contribute to societal decision-making (Callon et al., 2001/2009).

Connectivity between platforms results from the users' "shareability" ratio: the more relevant, emotional, and segmented the content, the greater connectivity it will bring. This will inevitably lead to positive visibility and make it easier to communicate information to the community. This generates a continuous feedback flow resulting from the high level of input generated from visibility to a potential audience. Through this one, call the community to action, which can bring the desired change. (Couldry, 2012)

Engagement

The concept of engagement refers to the exchange or personal connection that can be made through social media. It can serve as a starting point for assessing how effective PR strategies can be in this space. Developing a strategy that addresses the various aspects of social media culture is very important for successful PR. It can help organizations build a deeper understanding of their clients and the people who use it. The cultural changes that are happening in social media are forcing organizations to rethink their operations. These include the involvement of the public in decision-making (Motion et al., 2016).

Social networking platforms provide a space for individuals to share their daily experiences. Communication strategies that involve visual content and dialogue instead of just plain language are more effective at appealing to digitally competent audiences. Genuine engagement is

represented by a shift in the voice of conversation from an individualistic to a collective one. The focus of engagement is not on the organization but on the community. It can be difficult for public relations professionals to think in terms of community, but social media as a medium is likely to change the way organizations communicate (Motion et al., 2016). The foundation of this engagement approach is the belief that public relations must engage with social media audiences, pique their interest, and address their concerns. Organizations with governance responsibilities must consider how they can connect with and motivate social media audiences to promote social change or justice. If public relations wants to be part of everyday social media networks, it must demonstrate positive and productive outcomes. Social media networks have implicit expectations about the nature of engagement.

Meanings and policy-change preferences have always been heavily influenced by interpersonal contact and conversation. Over the years, media outlets (and politicians as well as companies) have operated on the assumption that they shape opinions and define the public interest. Today, on the contrary, the public—or various publics—define their own interests. (Self, 2010)

Engagement practices that follow a set pattern and do not match with the priorities of the general public, which may differ, are unlikely to resonate with or hold significance for them. To ensure effective governance, the principles of democracy, such as transparency, flexibility, options, and evolution, must take precedence over the objectives of the organization.

Feedback

As there is an assumption that these networks are staffed 24/7, a stream of complaints about the organization that would normally be resolved in private may rapidly become public and can create an element of negative backlash if a network is not monitored. A delay in responding to questionable content on an organization's Facebook page has the potential to create controversy. Facebook pages can also be subject to "trolling, a term that refers to the act of individuals or organized groups deliberately hijacking or diverting the purpose of a page by posting controversial or malicious comments (Motion, Heath, & Leitch, 2016).

The social media seem to be influenced by how "external" voices or feedback seek to engage with the various interlocked or interlinked social media networks. The grist for the discussion seems most valued when external sources communicate quickly with the network, are credible or

trustworthy, accurate, simple, complete, and engage in ways that help the discourse be broad in its appeal and inclusive in its reach (Freberg et al., 2013). The value of any external voice's engagement in a network's discourse presumes that the participants make decisions among themselves. Thus, for instance, emergency management serves communities best when it helps social media communities obtain the information, opinion, and advice they want to be efficacious in their decision-making and emergency enactment.

Meanings and policy-change preferences have always been heavily influenced by interpersonal contact and conversation. Over the years, media outlets (and politicians as well as companies) have operated on the assumption that they shape opinions and define the public interest. We suggest, however, that the public—or various publics—define their own interests. (Motion et al., 2016)

If an organization wants to be good and communicate well, its use of “social media needs to be genuinely social, or not at all” (Kent, 2013). That means that the organization needs to communicate about what users want to communicate about. It should be enacted so that the organization communicates with individuals as thoughtful and concerned persons, not as stereotypes. The discourse as enacted needs to serve the social media communities' interests, not those of the organization, at all or only.

Sharing

According to John (2013), sharing is the essential and foundational activity of Web 2.0, particularly on social networking sites. Social media operates based on user participation and sharing, which signifies an important departure from traditional media's content and control generated by media outlets and their influence (Jenkins et al., 2013). As a result, social media's conversational context involves a paradoxical space that is both public and private and restructures power dynamics through sharing practices. John (2013) identifies two types of sharing logic: distributive and communicative, where users create and spread content and interact through relational practices. While the term "sharing" implies positive connotations of equality, selflessness, and generosity, John (2013) argues that it has been appropriated by the social media industry as a rhetorical device to encourage and boost participation. Thus, it appears that social media promotes itself as a space for fostering positive social connections.

This feature of social media has unintentionally rendered a difficulty for commercial advertising endeavors to succeed, or it resent any imposition of information by organizations. Commercial intrusions are undesirable, provide no worth, and offer minimal significance for users (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). However, social media corporations may endeavor to exploit the affirmative implications of sharing information for financial gain by commercializing user actions (John, 2013). Even though users may seem to approve and validate such efforts by exchanging content, they simultaneously hold a grudge against blatant commercial disturbances within social media domains.

2.7.3. Strategies to ensure effectiveness and Accuracy of Information

Mechanisms for efficient, two-way communication with the public should always be in place as part of epidemic preparedness. The approach can be scaled at the beginning of an outbreak as necessary. To lessen the amount of time that rumors and false information can spread due to a lack of information, public health authorities and responders should be prepared to transmit accurate and current information through efficient, trusted channels from the start. The following factors need to be taken into account according to WHO outbreak guidelines (Estela et al., 2022).

Understanding the Communication Eco-System: different areas, nations, and social groupings have different tastes regarding the media they consume and trust, the sources they utilize, the language and format they prefer, and other factors. Identifying who uses and does not use online media is crucial because different messages may need to be delivered depending on who is receiving them. It's also vital to understand the political and social environment because it has a big impact on how rumors circulate and are perceived. Research that identifies influencers, opportunities, and barriers to the use and misuse of information can help prioritize efforts to prevent disinformation and enable more effective communication initiatives (Hutchinson, 2023).

Authorities and responding partners must deliver information that is clear, understandable, and straightforward through trusted, tested, and familiar networking technologies. To enable and encourage people to follow sound medical advice, essential information and resources should be made available. Moreover, efforts should be made to disseminate factual, real-time news about the pandemic to reduce uncertainty, anxiety, and panic. Therefore, it's crucial to be honest and admit

it when something unknown arises. According to a Google analysis, a lot of COVID-19-related queries are motivated by a need for practical knowledge, such as how long to wash one's hands. Easy-to-remember, straightforward instructions are more likely to be followed. Further, content styles that are simple to consume—like humorous memes with little text, tweets, photos, and videos—are more likely to be shared. Health authorities must modify their communication strategies to accommodate the "memetic" information transfer that characterizes the present digital communication ecosystem, according to experts. In order to be able to give consumers reliable information, health authorities and response partners should collaborate with social media platforms (Landi et al., 2021).

2.7.4. Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is a concept in communication developed by Walter Fisher. It is based on the idea that all meaningful communication occurs through the storytelling or reporting of events. Humans participate as storytellers and observers of narratives. This theory further claims that stories are more persuasive than arguments. (Fisher, 2002)

Essentially, the narrative paradigm helps to explain how humans are able to understand complex information through narrative. Walter Fisher developed this theory as a solution to making cohesive arguments. He conceptualized the theory as an effective way to communicate with the masses.

According to Fisher, people communicate by telling/observing a compelling story rather than by producing evidence. The theory states that every community accepts stories that match its values and beliefs, understood as common sense. (West & Turner, 2014)

The narrative approach requires stories to be credible, coherent, and to exhibit fidelity. Coherent stories are internally consistent, with sufficient detail, strong characters, and free of significant surprises. More importantly, the narrative question is whether the characters act reliably. If figures show continuity throughout their thoughts, motives, and actions, acceptance increases. However, characters behaving abnormally destroy acceptance. While fidelity is how the experience of a story rings true with past stories, the audience knows it to be true in their lives. Stories with fidelity may influence their beliefs and values. (West & Turner, 2014)

In other words, narrative theory is the idea that stories are the most effective way to communicate. Stories are more persuasive than arguments because they allow us to connect with the characters and their experiences on a personal level. When we hear a story, we are not just listening to facts; we are also experiencing the emotions of the characters. This makes stories much more memorable and persuasive than arguments.

Narrative theory has been used in a variety of fields, including communication, law, and education. It is a powerful tool that can be used to influence people's beliefs and actions.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3. Introduction

Research methods include all the techniques and methods that have been taken for conducting research, whereas research methodology is the approach in which research troubles are solved thoroughly. It is the science of studying how research is conducted systematically. In this field, the researcher explains the different steps generally taken to study a research problem. Hence, the scientific approach adopted for conducting research is called methodology (Mishra and Alok, 2017).

Jackson et al. (2007) explained that methodologies suggest how inquiries should proceed by indicating what problems are worth investigating, how to frame a problem so it can be explored, how to develop appropriate data generation, and how to make the logical link between the problem, data generated, analysis, and conclusions or inferences drawn.

This study is conducted to understand the practice of using and managing social media as a PR tool in the context of the MoH. To achieve this objective, the researcher employed the following research methodology:.

3.1. Research Design

Babbie (2007) defined research design as the framework of research methods and techniques chosen by a researcher. At this stage, the researcher chooses methods that are suitable for the subject matter and sets up her studies for success. In other words, research design determines which and how to use research tools.

For Grey (2014), the research design sets the procedure for the required data, the methods applied to collect and analyze the data, and how all of these are going to answer the research questions.

Hence, to answer the research question and meet the objectives of this study, the researcher will employ a qualitative method.

Qualitative Research

In this work, the researcher employed a qualitative research method and data analysis. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or photos) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research (Bhandari, 2020).

According to Viswambharan and Priya (2015), the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues or phenomena systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied and to generate new concepts and theories. They added that the choice of methodology is directed by the questions being raised.

The researcher employed a qualitative research method due to the nature of the study. Hence, the qualitative data collected by the researcher using in-depth interviews was organized, transcribed, translated, and qualitatively analyzed in line with the objective of this research work. In addition, social media messages collected from the Facebook page of the Ministry of Health were organized, grouped, and coded in different themes, and the results were observed to learn the nature of the messages conveyed through this social media outlet.

3.1.1. Qualitative Content Analysis /Contextual Analysis

Textual analysis is generally a type of qualitative analysis beyond the manifested content of the media, and it focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text (Fürsich, 2009).

In the application of qualitative content analysis, there are three distinct approaches: conventional, directed, and summative. The major differences among the approaches are coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness. In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, the analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. Summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context (Shannon & Hsieh, 2005). Since there was no pre-defined category through which to process and analyze the text, the researcher employed a conventional approach. This is

because, in analyzing the text, there were no predefined categories. The study focused only on the text and on giving meaning to the text based on the context.

When measuring the posted messages that will be used in this research, the authenticity and credibility would not be questioned since almost all the contents were collected from their original possessors.

3.2. Unit of analysis

The researcher tried to include any COVID-19-related posts that were posted in Amharic on the official Facebook account run by the ministry. Therefore, the unit of analysis of the research is at the single Facebook post level. Other messages, apart from COVID-19, are not to be analyzed. In addition, in terms of the content of the unit of analysis, the type of message and tone of the story were tested.

To this end, the researcher categorized the content into five categories, such as the date of the post, message type, aim and tone of the message, and level of emphasis.

3.3. In-depth interview

In-depth interviews are one of the main methods of data collection used in qualitative research. It is optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when specific topics are being explored (Mack et al., 2005). In-depth interviewing as a method in media research enables us to find out about people's ideas, opinions, and attitudes (Stokes, 2003).

In-depth interviews provide detailed background about the respondents' specific answers. Elaborate data regarding respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings is obtained. In addition, in-depth interviews allow interviewers to form questions based on each respondent's answers (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Therefore, in-depth interviews in this study have helped to probe into the responses and reflections of the PR and communication department heads, and PR practitioners were selected to be the respondents for the study. In particular, these interviews have made the researcher able to explore

the views and perspectives of the interviewees regarding the practice, message crafting, mechanisms, and challenges of operating the social media account of the MoH. The need to conduct the in-depth interview, as explained above, is to get intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their first-hand views and opinions. To fulfill the aim of the research, we used semi-structured questions to guide the interview. However, the researcher used the follow-up questions flexibly to dig out a better understanding of the issue.

This interview was carried out from mid-July to mid-August.

3.4.Data Source

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this research work. Primary data was qualitatively collected from the manager of the communication department and PR experts working on the Facebook page of the Ministry of Health through in-depth interviews. Social media messages and content published on social media accounts of the ministry will be used as a primary source of data. These messages are also used as input for textual content analysis.

3.5.Sampling Techniques

The researcher used purposive sampling to gather primary data. Purposive sampling (also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment while selecting members of the population to participate in the study. D'Exelle (2014) also stated that purposive sampling is an intentional selection of informants based on their ability to clarify a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon.

The head of the communication department and PR expert who are managing the social media account at MoH headquarter have been selected for in-depth interviews. The respondents are selected with the assumption that they can provide accurate information, which can help answer the research questions of this work.

Furthermore, out of the social media accounts of the ministry, Facebook will be used for content analysis. This is because the selected social media account is relatively active and frequently updated, particularly during the first six months after the outbreak of the pandemic. In addition, the contents of these social media outlets were selected for content analysis with the purpose of

further understanding the nature of the messages conveyed via the selected outlets. The time frame selected for analysis was between April 9, 2020, and July 7, 2020. This time frame was selected because it's a moment when the MoH started a campaign about COVID-19. Besides, the selected time frame is when cases of infection started increasing at an alarming rate. The analysis is limited to covering messages only related to COVID-19.

3.6.Developing Content Categories

After identifying the units of analysis in the content analysis, the next step was establishing and defining the categories under which the posts from MoH are organized. There are two ways of establishing categories in content analysis: Emergent coding and prior coding. Emergent coding involves establishing categories after studying the text—it is the coding mechanism implemented in this research. On the contrary, prior coding required establishing the categories before collecting and studying the data. In this study, the researcher employed emergent coding, taking posts from MoH's Facebook page as a source for the coding. Categories are established after a preliminary examination of the data gathered from MoH's Facebook page.

The resulting category system is constructed based on common themes that emerge from the data themselves. The researcher has defined and categorized variables and their categories in order to code posts. The selected stories were analyzed inductively, without predefined categories at hand.

3.7.Data analysis and interpretation

According to Bui (2009), the qualitative approach, where the data are mostly narrative, would involve a coding process to organize and label the data into meaningful chunks. In presenting the collected data through an in-depth interview, a description of the research setting, including the respondent's position, and data obtained from participant observation were analyzed in accordance with the themes that have been used throughout data collection.

The collected data through in-depth interviews was transcribed, translated, interpreted, and analyzed based on the theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter 2. The interview was conducted in Amharic, and the interviewees were able to speak fluently. Each interviewee was recorded while responding to all the interview questions. The researcher transcribed as well as

translated each audio recording of the interviewee into English. As for the analysis of the interviews, the discussions were sorted out according to thematic relevance and then presented in combination with specific responses.

The analyses were also made thematically rather than using specific guiding questions to uphold analytical and contextual feasibility. For citing the respondent's idea in the analysis part, the respondent's code was used.

3.8. Issues of Validity and Reliability

Reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time it is employed. (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) In other words, if the technique fails to yield the same result on the same object, it is unreliable.

Before beginning the full-scale data coding, appropriate training was given to two data coders. The coders piloted samples, which are 10% of 250 MoH social media posts. This pilot test helped the researcher reveal inconsistencies and inadequacies in the category construction. The two coders first discussed the coding instructions carefully and coded 25 Facebook posts related to COVID-19 issues to check inter-coder reliability. The agreements between the two coders were 20 on the content categories of the issues. Applying the intercoder reliability formula suggested by Holsti (1969), cited in Wimmer & Dominick (2011), which suggested a method of computing intercoder reliability by calculating a coefficient of reliability. It is calculated by dividing the number of posts placed in the same category by the number of units coded.

$$\text{Coefficient Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of unit in the same category}}{\text{Total number of units coded}}$$

$$R = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$$

Where M is the number of coding decisions, on which the two coders agree, and N1 and N2 are the total number of coding decisions made by the first and the second coder respectively. Thus, the two coders judged a sample of 18 Facebook posts about COVID-19 and agreed on 15 of the categories, the calculation is,

$$R = \frac{2(20)}{25 + 25} + \frac{40}{50} = 0.8$$

Therefore, inter coder reliability is 0.8. This means, according to Holsti (1969), cited in (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) it is reliable and acceptable.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

This study was done on the bases of informed permission and confidentiality of the information that was assured by excluding names of respondent from identification. Privacy matters of all correspondents on the study will be kept in a very careful way. No one participated in the study will be exposed for danger due to what he/she express for the sake of study input. Sources /documents/ used in the study were cited carefully.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

4. Introduction

This research is set out to explore the management and usage of social media platforms by PR practitioners of the Ministry of Health during the outbreak of COVID-19. In order to fulfill these aims, qualitative data were collected using an in-depth interview. The interview was conducted with five members of the public relations department of the Ministry of Health. This section primarily analyzes approaches used to enable the transfer of information about COVID-19 as well as to increase the exposure range of contents posted about COVID-19 by the ministry.

In addition, the researcher gathered messages posted about COVID-19 on the official Facebook page of the ministry for qualitative content analysis. The gathered messages were posted on the ministry's Facebook page from April 9, 2020, to July 7, 2020, and there were 250 posts in total. This time frame was selected because it's a moment when the MoH started a campaign about COVID-19. Besides, July is a month when a high number of cases start to be recorded.

4.1. Characteristics of Respondents

The five respondents of the in-depth interview were selected for their direct or immediate involvement in the social media activities of the ministry. Particularly, these respondents were among active individuals who have been working to deliver information about COVID-19 to the public. All respondents are stationed at the headquarter office of the Ministry of Health, under the department of communication. Similarly, the researcher refers to the same department as 'the communication department' in the following discussions.

The respondents have a service time ranging from three (3) years up to nine (9) years at the MoH, with education qualifications that range from Bachelor degrees to Masters. They are serving in the positions of head of department (1 respondent), program producer (respondent 2), graphic design officer (respondent 3), senior communication officer (respondent 4), and Facebook post manager (respondent 5). The participants of the in-depth interview provided an average of thirty-five (35) minutes of audio-recorded data. The data, which was recorded in Amharic, was transcribed into fifteen (15) pages of Amharic script and then translated into 19 pages of English script.

4.2. Adoption of Facebook as Means to Inform the Public about COVID-19

It was back in 2014 that the Ministry of Health adopted Facebook as a means to communicate with the public. Particularly, the platform has become popular and active since the outbreak of COVID. The Communication and Community Engagement Strategy prepared by the MoH and EPHI for COVID-19 laid out social media as one of the means to communicate in addressing the pandemic. MOH and EPHI tried to prepare the platforms to control the decentralized information and tried to speak with one voice.

The overall objective of Ethiopia's risk Communication and Community Engagement Strategy for COVID-19 is to empower communities at different levels to adopt preventive and health-seeking behaviors to slow the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Social media platforms, especially Facebook, were the alternative means of delivering COVID-19 information to an educated virtual society. These societies have public acceptability, and they can persuade society easily. The fact that the platform is prepared for an educated virtual community is further affirmed by all the respondents. According to respondent 1, the sole purpose of the Ministry of Health official Facebook is to bring health-related information to those who are literate.

“The aim is to deliver health and health related information to the targeted audience. There is certain section of the community that participates in social networking sites. Especially young people in urban areas who have Internet access. It is to enable these community members to bring a behavioral change by providing them with information.”

The above quote from the respondent further specifies that the targeted audiences are those who can access the internet as well as those who are familiar with using Facebook or social media. Therefore, with the limited number of internet and social media users in Ethiopia, the ministry is addressing a limited number of people through its Facebook page.

During the outbreak of COVID-19, the MoH's Facebook page was dominated by daily updates on new infections, recovery, critical illnesses, and deaths. Prevention tips and other COVID-related news were also on the page. Other health-related issues rarely appear on the ministry's Facebook page. Respondent number 5 affirmed the above statement.

“We were preparing two types of messages. One of the messages is the daily number of people infected with the epidemic, who have recovered, and who are in intensive care. In addition, the other is where we post prevention mechanism. At the time, COVID-19 was unusual happening and the community was in panic, so obviously those messages used to have large number of share and view.”

The above interviewee’s quote further indicates the unusualness of the pandemic, and the panic among the people exponentially increased the number of people who followed the Ministry of Health on Facebook. Especially during early 2020, when the public was unclear and wanted to know more about the pandemic, the literate segment rushed to check the MoH’s Facebook page. Therefore, the current 1.4 million followers of the ministry's Facebook page have been generated during the last two years.

Most of the interviewees believe that the circumstances created by COVID-19 have helped the ministry’s Facebook page garner millions of followers. However, interviewee number two argues that the unusual condition created by the pandemic is not the only reason for the swift increase in followers; it is also coupled with the information presented by the ministry’s practitioner.

“...the number of our followers has grown to millions due to two reasons. The first reason is that the community paid attention to the health conditions at that time, and the second is because we worked to meet the needs of the community.”

Apart from talking about the daily statistics and precautionary measures, the ministry used its Facebook page to inform the public about the government’s preparedness and response to the outbreak. Beyond publicizing the ministry’s effort as a government body, such contents serve to avert panic across the public. The following excerpt is from the post from June 2 that depicts the government’s response.

“ባለፉት ሁለት ወራት ማዕከሉን የማደራጀት ሥራ ሲሰራ መቆየቱ የሚታወቅ ሲሆን ማዕከሉ 40 የጽኑ ሕመማን መኝታዎችና 1 ሺህ ጽኑ ያልሆኑ ሕመማን ታካሚዎች አገልግሎት መስጠት ይችላል።ጎን ለጎንም የላቦራቶሪ፣ የመድሃኒት ቤት፣ የጤና ባለሙያዎች ልብስ መቀየሪያ፣ መታጠቢያዎችና ሌሎች ክፍሎችም ተዘጋጅተዋል።”

“...It is known that MOH has been working on organizing COVID-19 center in the last two months, and the center can provide 40 intensive care beds and 1 thousand non-intensive

patients. A laboratory, a medicine, changing rooms for health professionals, bathrooms and other rooms have also been prepared.”

“በሀገራችን ኢትዮጵያ የኮሮና ቫይረስ በሽታ የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ ባለመኖሩ ወደ ደቡብ አፍሪካ ናሙናዎችን እየተላከ ውጤቱን ለማወቅ የጊዜና የገንዘብ ወጪ ያስከትል እንደነበር ይታወሳል።

የጤና ሚኒስቴር ይህን ችግር በመረዳት በአጭር ጊዜ በአገር ውስጥ የመመርመሪያ መሳሪያዎችን በሚሟላት እና ባለሙያዎችን በማሰልጠን የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ ማዕከላትን አደራጅቷል።

እስከ ግንቦት 24 ቀን 2012 ዓ.ም ድረስ 112,377 ሰዎች የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ የተከናወነ ሲሆን ይህም በአገር አቀፍ ደረጃ በአጭር ጊዜ የኮሮና ቫይረስ (ኮቪድ-19) በሽታ የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ አቅም እየጨመረ እንደሚገኝ ያሳያል።”

“...It is recalled that due to the lack of laboratory tests for the corona virus in Ethiopia, samples were sent to South Africa to find out the results, which increases additional time and money. Understanding this problem, the Ministry of Health organized laboratory testing centers in a short period of time by equipping the centers with testing equipment and training professionals. As of May 24, 2020, laboratory testing was done for 112,377 people, which shows the increment of corona testing capacity in a short period at the national level.”

“በጤና ሚኒስቴር የህዝብ ግንኙነትና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ዳይሬክቶሬት ዳይሬክተር ዶ/ር ተገኔ ረጋሳ በሰጡት ጋዜጣዊ መግጫ እንደገለጹት ኮሮና ቫይረስን በአገር አቀፍ ደረጃ ለመከላከልና ለመቆጣጠር በፌዴራል፣ በየክልሎችና በየተቋማቱ ያሉትን አደራጃጅዎችና ተቋማት ዓቅም ለማጠናከርና ለመደገፍ ትኩረት ተሰጥቶ እየተሰራ ነው ብለዋል። እንደ ዳይሬክተሩ ገለጻ መንግስት የችግሩን ጥልቀት አስቀድሞ በመገንዘብ የተለያዩ አደራጃጅዎችን ሚኒስቴር መስርያ ቤቶችን ጭምር በማደራጀት የሚመለከታቸው ባለድርሻ አካላት በማሳተፍ በሙሉ ዓቅሙ እየሰራ ነው ሲሉም ተናግረዋል።”

“...Director of the Public Relations and Communication of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Tegene Regasa, said in a press conference that efforts are being made to strengthen and support the capacity of the organizations and institutions at the federal, regional and national levels to prevent and control the Corona nationwide. According to the director, the government has already realized the depth of the problem and is working with all its capacity by organizing various organizations including the ministries and involving other relevant stakeholders.”

These posts show the government's readiness to combat COVID-19, and simultaneously, these posts are telling the community that facilities as well as equipment are ready to save lives. However, more likely, the posts promote the government's achievement in sorting out the preparedness and response mechanisms.

4.3. Spreading information through Social media Connections

A large number of contents posted on the Ministry of Health's Facebook page from April 9 to July 7, 2020 can be classified into four categories: daily updates, responses, preparedness, and prevention mechanisms. These pieces of information are considered lifesaving if they reach a larger audience. The unique features of Facebook or any social media that enable users to create connections with other users are considered a powerful tool for the spread of information, according to social media integration theory. This connection can go between individuals or from individual to organization.

Addressing day-to-day communal challenges, appealing to multiple values, and developing a network of advocates could be what leads to connections between organizations and numerous individuals. Such connections will create a chain reaction of information across the platform.

4.3.1. Addressing day to day communal challenges

The ministry of health commenced posting information about the number of people infected, recovered, and critically ill, as well as the travel history of those infected. Apart from this information, which is a mix of numerical and situational briefs, the ministry's post-COVID-19 prevention mechanisms, symptoms, encouraging support for the needy, and many other issues that the community would face daily. According to interviewee number one, message development takes place after assessing the gap across the public.

"...At that moment, providing the correct scientific information to the public was our primary goal. Accordingly, our first task is to calm the society. Second, we advise the society to be cautious and follow scientific practices. Look, when we design a message, we start by looking the gap in the society. Therefore, we design a message that can fix that specific problem. This made the public take better care of itself. For example, the message "Put the mask on" posted and broadcasted frequently."

Besides encouraging “put on masks,” the ministry also posted how to make masks at home with a video illustration. Such posts were part of the effort to show an affordable practical solution, according to interviewee number two.

“Regarding protective materials, we have posted educational videos and articles on our Facebook page for people who can afford to buy and use them, as well as for those who cannot afford them, how to make them from materials found at home. Among them, how to make alcohol, sanitizer and mask at home has been contents published in writing and video. We were able to deliver these contents to the target members of the society through the opportunity the platform has offered.”

To include more of the day-to-day incidents in the community, the page also tries to post tailored messages for unique social assortments, such as holy days. April and May 2020 were months that hosted two important happenings for the two major religions in Ethiopia: Islam and Christianity. In these months, the two religions held fasting which require them to attend congregations. In addition, at the end of the fasting the community is required to celebrate in mass. So, the ministry has composed a message using government officials, including the prime minister, so the people can avoid what they used to do (public gathering) during such an assortment in normal time.

The following links <https://fb.watch/menKzke1-F/> <https://fb.watch/menYTqs3jI/> <https://www.facebook.com/ethiopianewsagency/videos/4139121606128378> are videos posted on MoH’s Facebook page. These videos contain a happy holiday wish and a request to practice precautionary measures from the Prime Minister and Minister of Health. The two-personality-designed message requesting the public pause the long tradition they used to practice. They don’t simply request the followers to stop attending the congregation; rather, they acknowledge the importance of those activities, and they both explain how unfortunate it is to depart for a moment from those important things they love to do.

One of the critical challenges people faced during the outbreak of COVID-19 was economic. Those with low-level income are the most affected since movement has been restricted across the country. For people at low levels of living standards, finding their daily substance was very hard. Because

of this situation, the Ministry of Health tries to encourage sharing among the society. On April 15, 2020, the ministry’s Facebook page shared a post from the prime minister's office that urged the public to share for the needy.



The call was made to all Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopians to share food for those in need. In fact, a state emergency was declared to restrict the movement of people, which in turn affected the movement of goods and services. The daily laborers, people with disabilities, beggars, and some other section of society who would not have any stock or savings to use obviously run out of food. Therefore, there was concern that hunger would kill people more than COVID-19 would.

Apart from calling on people to share food with the needy, the ministry’s Facebook page started to post the support given by different entities. Posts in this category appeared to encourage those who are giving what they can as well as inspire others to do the same.

On May 1, the MoH posted news that some of its employees provided food and sanitation equipment for the ministry’s employees with low salaries.

“የጤና ምክንያት ሰራተኞች የምግብ እና የንጽህና ምጠበቂያ ቁሳቁስ ለገሱ የጤና ምክንያት ሰራተኞች በኮሮና ምክንያት ኑሮ ለከብዳቸው የምስሪያቤቱ ሰራተኞች የምግብ እና የንጽህና ምጠበቂያ ቁሳቁስ በዝሬው አለት ለገሱ።”

*“Ministry of Health employees donated food and hygiene materials
 Health Ministry employees donated food and hygiene materials to the employees of the ministry whose life is getting difficult due to Corona...”*

Then this post, followed by the support given to the government from different foreign governments, local and international companies, as well as events of feeding the needy, has been covered by the ministry's Facebook page.

The researcher tried to observe the posts on the Ministry of Health's Facebook page during the early period of the (April–June 2020) COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the organization's Facebook page is engulfed with daily situational updates: posts that present the number of new cases, active cases, critically ill cases, deaths, and the number of tested individuals. This information is posted on a daily basis. In fact, this information was important during those early periods of the pandemic, since it was new information and helped the public understand what was going on regarding the pandemic. This is the type of information consistently posted. Interviewee number two affirms this observation.

“...The first category of information is the number of people who have been infected, died, diagnosed and other issues related to the disease (daily update). Apart from that, once a day there was a post of various messages about the pandemic. So once a day there was a daily update and a message about the disease.”

According to the interviewee number, two “various messages” mean it could be the visit of officials to different health institutions, a ceremony of receiving aid, activities done by regional institutions, or other health issues other than COVID-19. Some of these are not as helpful to address the public's day-to-day challenges paused by the pandemic. Rather, they are a kind of message that shows face value rather than adding the real value or relatively having no value for the urgent issue at hand. On May 8, 2020, the ministry's Facebook page published the following post:

“Centers readied for Corona prevention in the south region visited by officials

The federal and southern regional officials led by the Minister of Health visited the emergency services of the region and Hawassa city COVID-19 quarantine and treatment centers. The officials led by Dr. Dereje Duguma said that they have realized that various activities done to prevent the spread of the corona virus.

They further said that more preparation needed to prevent the epidemic by enhancing the medical centers and quarantine areas in the region with workers and medical equipment.

57 quarantine centers, 34 quarantine centers and 19 treatment centers have been set up in the southern region...”

The above message posted on May 8, 2020, is a type of post that has less importance in informing the mass about the challenge they face due to the pandemic. The above text simply describes the visit of officials to the centers. Moreover, the whole paragraph is just an unclear report of the activities done by the southern region.

There are some posts that lead the community toward the wrong assumption or conclusion. Most of such messages came from reporting activities conducted at the regional and zonal levels to prevent the pandemic. Some of these posts give the sense that the regions or zones have completed the preparations needed to stop COVID-19. The news posted on May 7, 2020, on the ministry’s Facebook page is a suitable example.

“The West Arsi Zone Health Office of Oromia Region has announced that it has completed the necessary preparations to prevent the spread of the Corona virus (COVID-19).

Riad Umer, the head of the health office of West Arsi Zone in Oromia region, said that in order to prevent the corona virus, the zone has prepared an isolation center that will serve 372 people, and a hospital with 72 beds has been prepared to provide treatment to those who are admitting”

The above post communicates the idea that the zone is ready for whatever comes in related to COVID-19. However, what is mentioned as “complete preparation” is very small for the two million people residing in the zone. Apart from exaggeration, such messages can create a sense of reluctance among the people, and it is against the repeatedly posted message of precaution.

4.3.2. Develop Networks of Advocate.

During the COVID-19 outbreak in Ethiopia, it was decreed that the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Public Health Institute, was the only information provider concerning COVID-19. That means government organizations, media houses, and other stakeholders only share or repost what the Ministry of Health’s Facebook page has posted. That means visitors to the ministry’s Facebook page will obviously increase. Beyond that, a specific message from the Ministry of Health has more exposure since the audience of other institutions has the chance to see it.

There was also formal deliberation to intensify the chain reaction of information according to interviewee number.

“Information about COVID-19 provided only by the Ministry of Health and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute. Government and non-government organizations at different levels have shared these messages on their social media account. Apart from this, there were meetings and consultations to increase the level of sharing. The Ministry of Health's Facebook followers has increased following the outbreak of COVID-19.”

One of the advocates of the ministry is a government structure in the health sector. As a federal institution, the Ministry of Health has a sort of commanding authority or set of directives for regional, zonal, and district-level government entities working on public health.

As the outbreak created unique circumstances across the country, this power of the ministry extended to other federal institutions. The fact that federal institutions and their leaders have adhered to the COVID-19 guidelines the ministry has laid out is proof. Most of these institutions have been sharing the daily report posted by the MoH on their social media pages. The prime minister's office is one of the government bodies that has been sharing the MoH's posts on its Facebook page.

Beside the government structure, transmitting the message through the connection between celebrities and government officials was another approach used by the ministry to spread its message. Obviously, celebrities are believed to have a large number of followers on their Facebook page or account, as they have fans across the country. Using the celebrities Facebook accounts or involving them in message development was the strategy.

Interviewee number four confirms that the ministry of health used the approach discussed in the above paragraph.

“In addition to our efforts in enriching content, we have used famous people to reach out more people as well as to give our contents an artistic flavor. We have organized various events and brought these events to Facebook. In this way, we have enabled the content to be widely shared.”

Nevertheless, interviewee number three disagree with interviewee number three. Interviewee number three believes the approach has not utilized ultimately.

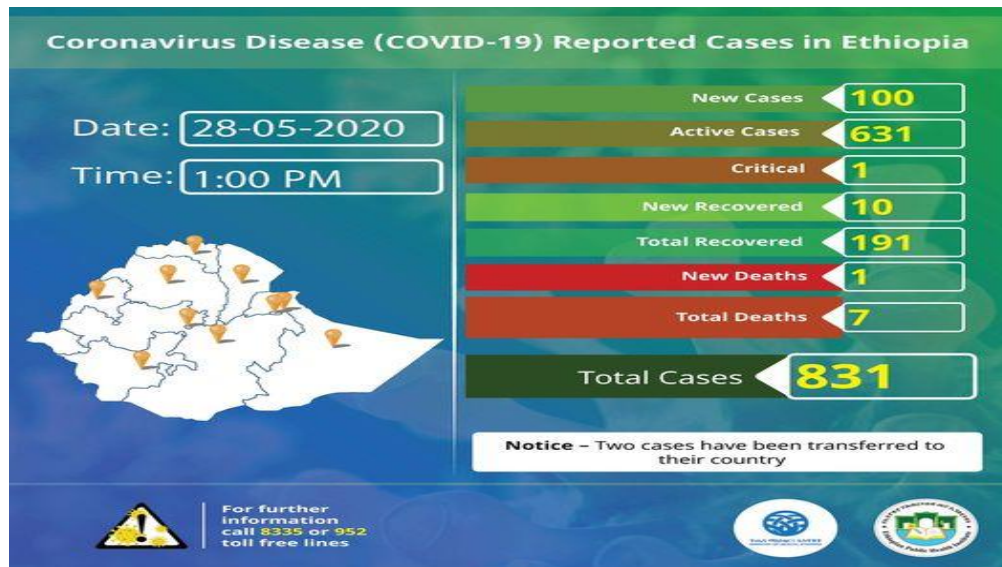
“Posting contents using celebrities is important during situation like this. Famous people have more followers, so their posts can be seen by more people. I don't think we have used many famous people in this regard, this is a gap. Particularly in encouraging them to share our post in their social media has not been enough. Moreover, while we develop messages, we have gaps in di diversifying the celebrities we involve...”

According to interviewee number three, so much can be done through the ultimate utilization of celebrities' connections on social media. Diversifying the celebrities is also another concern for the interviewee. Different celebrities from different walks of life have different audiences. Those who are known for their music have a fan who likes their style or the music in general. Those known for their acting, pieces of writing, or activism have a diverse audience. Therefore, diversifying celebrities depending on their specialization would make it easier to transfer knowledge or information about COVID-19.

The researcher has also witnessed a lack of diversification in the contents developed by the ministry involving celebrities. For instance, in April 2020, the ministry's Facebook page posted a number of educational videos that involved celebrities. Most of these videos contain actors who take part mostly in comic scenes. However, there was an exceptional video posted on April 6, 2020, that involved musicians, actors, and authors.

4.3.3. Inspire Change and spark online conversation

Social media is a space where people share their everyday lives. Conversational approaches and the use of visual imagery rather than just factual messaging and language resonate with digitally literate audiences. However, concerning the Ministry of Health, the most dominant message on its Facebook page is the daily situational update, which is a daily COVID-19 statistical update. In fact, this information is important in helping the literate social media audience understand the status of the pandemic. However, this is repetitive numerical information that may not resonate with the audience. However, the factual daily update is presented in two ways. One with just a table and numbers. Unlike the previous one, the other one explains the circumstances under which people were infected by the virus, the pattern of the pandemic, and some precautionary measures.



The first format just put numbers in each category of information. It looks like quick facts of the day about COVID-19. The design is simple and it appears it is been made for quick fact finders.

COVID-19 Situational Update as of Today

Total laboratory test conducted	109,451
Laboratory tests conducted within 24 hours	2,836
Number of Confirmed cases within 24 hours	109
Total active cases	950
Patients in severe condition	4
Newly Recovered	1
Total Recovered	209
Total Deaths	11
Returned to their country	2
Total confirmed cases as of today	1,172

The laboratory samples were collected from the high-risk community members, returnees/passengers at mandatory quarantine centers, contacts of the confirmed cases, health facility visitors and suspects at isolation centers.

Considering the increase in transmission of COVID-19, the Ministry of Health and Ethiopian Public Health Institute would like the public to strictly adhere to all precaution measures. We need to be reminded that every single action we take determines the risk of contracting the virus. Therefore, we should:

- Maintain physical distancing
- Wash our hands with water and soap frequently
- Stay at home and avoid mass gatherings
- Cover our mouth and nose with face/cloth mask when going outdoors

For more information or to report if any person had contact with confirmed COVID-19 please call to the free toll line 8335 and 952 or to regular phone 0118276796 and regional toll free lines, or use our email: sphicoc@gmail.com.

Dr. Lia Tadesse

Notification Note on COVID-19 Situational Update

The total laboratory tests conducted within 24 hours are 2,836; of these 109 of them are confirmed positive for COVID-19 and the total confirmed cases as of today are 1,172. Among the confirmed cases, 61 of them are male and 48 are female and their age ranges from 5 to 70 years. All of the confirmed cases are Ethiopians. Among the cases, 99 of them are identified from Addis Ababa, 2 from Tigray region, 5 from Oromia region and 3 from Harari region. The potential sources of exposure of the confirmed cases are presented below:

Potential Exposure	Number of Cases
Travel history from abroad	2
Known contact with confirmed cases	13
Cases with no known contact with confirmed cases and no travel history	94
Total	109

Three Ethiopians have passed away and the laboratory tests turned positive for COVID-19. Deaths are a 29 years old female, from Sejit Humera, Tigray region, a 75 years old female from Addis Ababa and a 55 years old male from Kefa zone, SNNPR (who recently moved to Addis Ababa). The first two were receiving care in a health facility while the third one was a dead body taken to health facility for forensic investigation and sample was tested positive for COVID-19. This brings the total death related to COVID-19 in our country to Eleven (11). Ministry of Health and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute would like to pass its condolences to the families.

Furthermore, one (1) person from Tigray region recovered from the disease bringing the total number of recoveries 209.

The second format contains a more elaborate situational update. Unlike the previous one, this format provides a textual explanation concerning the number of confirmed cases in terms of gender, age, location, and the circumstances of the infection. The format also provides a similar

explanation of how people recovered from the disease. The two-page daily situational update also contains places where laboratory samples were taken and finally lists down the necessary precautions after stating the trajectory of the pandemic.

This information (the daily updates) is a kind of fact that forces the readers to reach a conclusion. If we look at the structure of the message, it starts by stating the number of infected people by the virus out of the total tested people in 24 hours. Then it went on to classify the number of infected people in terms of gender and age. Which means anyone could be infected regardless of age or gender. Then it describes the circumstances of the infection, which are known and unknown. This could frighten those who receive the message since there are unknown situations that lead to infection; on the other hand, this could create uncertainty. Additionally, it has the message that local transmission is getting bigger, so the chance of being infected is also increasing. Then it brings the consequence, which is death, and this is followed by the fact that only one person recovered from the disease. In this specific daily report, one can conclude that the chance of recovering from COVID-19 is less likely. After stating all those scary facts, the ministry advises the public to adhere to the precautionary measures. All the facts stated in the upper part of the daily update reinforce the last part of the message, which requests that the public practice the precautionary measures or face what is coming. Therefore, the message is designed as a means to warn rather than inspire change.

Despite such numerical facts, there are moments when the Ministry of Health posts an inspiring message on its Facebook page. On May 22, 2020, the ministry posted the prime minister's good wishes video message for Muslims' Holliday (Eid Al-Adaha).

“በተለይ እንደ ዘንድር ባለ ወቅት የሚጸጸ ደም ወረርሽኝን የማሸነፊያ ተልቁ መሳሪያ ነውና ደሙ ከአይምሮ የሚጠፋ አይሆንም። ምክንያቱም የደሙን ወር የተቀበልነውም የምንሸኘውም የኮሮና ወረርሽኝ ከከፈተብን ጦርንነት ፊትለፊት በተጋጠምንበት ብዙሀ አስቸጋሪ ወቅት በመሆኑ ነው።... ብዙዎች ደሙን ያሳለፉት እና ስግደቱን የሰጉዱት በየቤታቸው በመሆን ነበር። ይህን ወቅት በትዕግስት፣ በታዛዥነት እና በአርቆ አሳቢነት ላሳለፉ ሙሴም ወንድም እና እህቶቹ ምሳጋና ማቅረብ እውዳለሁ። ህዝባችን ሳይጎዳ ወረርሽኝን እንድናሳልፍ ሲሉ መራር የሆነውን ወሳኔ ያሳለፉ የሃይማኖት አባቶች እና የእነሱን ትእዛዝ ያከበሩትን የሙሴም ወገኖቻችንን የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ በኩራት እና አድናቆትና ሲያስታውሳቸው ይኖራል።

የኮሮና ቫይረስ ለመከላከል የኛንም የወገኖቻችንንም ህይወት ለመጠበቅ የረመዳን እሴቶች ትሩፋት የላቀ መሆኑን አምነን ነው ያሙን የጀመርነው።

እስከ ኢድ አልፈጥር ዋዜማ የነበሩትን ግዜያት ብዙዎች ንፅህናቸውን በመጠበቅ፣ ከመጨባበጥ በመቆጠብ፣ አካላዊ ርቀትን በመጠበቅ፣ በመተጋገዝ፣ ከቤት ባለመውጣት፣ ማሃበራዊ አገልግሎቶች ላይ በመሳተፍ የሚቻላቸውን ሁሉ አድርገዋል። ያሙን በሰላም አሳልፎ ለኢድ ያደረሰን ፈጣሪ የወረርሽኙንም ጊዜም አሳልፎ ለመልካሙ ጊዜ እንደሚያደርሰን ሙሉ እምነት አለኝ።”

“Especially at a time like this, fasting is a great tool to defeat the epidemic, so this year fasting will not be forgotten. The reason is that we have started the month of Ramadan and we are going to finish it in such a difficult time, which is a moment we are fighting the war waged by the corona epidemic. I would like to thank my Muslim brothers and sisters who have spent this time with patience, obedience and foresight. Religious leaders and the Muslims who obeyed their orders will be remembered throughout Ethiopia’s history with pride and admiration, for making the bitter decision, so that our people could pass the epidemic unscathed.”

“Until the eve of ‘Eid al-Fitr,’ many did their best by maintaining their cleanliness, avoiding shaking hands, maintaining physical distance, helping each other, not leaving the house, and participating in social services. I have full faith that the creator who made us pass the fasting month in peace and brought us to Eid will also pass the time of plague and bring us to the good time.”

In fact, the ministry of health has taken the PM’s video message for ‘Eid al-Fitr’ from the Prime Minister Office Facebook page. Even though another party has created the content of the message, it serves the sole objective of the ministry. Therefore, that is why it has been used on the Facebook page of MoH.

The researcher finds the content to be a well-organized message to inspire change. Looking at the above transcription of the video, the message revolves around the dearest thing to the Muslim community—religion. The message has blended the issue of religion with the current burning issue across the public. The message starts by acknowledging the difficulty the Muslim community has gone through because of the pandemic. Such a beginning is obviously helpful to capture the attention of the targeted audience. Then it was followed by appreciation and compliments for the faithful and their leaders for showing resilience despite the difficult situation. The message keeps

on appreciating the Muslim community for practicing the precaution needed to stop COVID-19, in spite of their wish to go to Masjid.

After commending and acknowledging the Muslim community, the PM expressed his strong belief that change will come. In his message, the PM linked the coming of change with spiritual power. All these approaches to designing messages are intended to inspire change and convince the public to keep on practicing precautionary measures. To realize the intended goal and gain the trust of the community, the message is constructed in line with what is close to them.

On April 28, 2020, the Ministry of Health collaborated with a couple of music producers and came up with a music clip. The song is about responsibility and saving lives. More specifically, it calls upon the public to practice prevention mechanisms responsibly so they can save lives.

The music clip can be categorized under contemporary pop. The music video almost contained all the important messages needed during the pandemic, specifically about adhering to precautionary measures and helping those in need. In general, the music tries to communicate that acting with responsibility can save lives, and everyone can do so. The music is accompanied by expressive video, representing people from different occupations, religions, and social classes. The diversified representation would help the message be noticed and internalized by different sections of society. The music approach can also be more effective among young people.

4.4. Increasing Contents Exposure on Facebook

According to the interviewees, there are different mechanisms they put in place to increase the exposure of contests about COVID-19 posted on the Ministry of Health's Facebook page. After conducting interviews with five communication experts, the researcher has identified four mechanisms employed on the ministry's Facebook page, which are content development, content format, and Facebook booster.

4.4.1. Content Development

This is a process where communication experts come up with ideas on how to present a certain message. Particularly, it is where they decide the design, format, what to include and what not, as well as the type (informative or educational) of the message. According to interviewee number one, before posting any messages about COVID-19, health experts verify the authenticity of the messages.

“Therefore, we work to make the message catchy by using graphics and other methods. Apart from this, we are careful to make the message clear, balanced and accurate.”

Most of features claimed by interviewee number one can be found on messages presented in graphics and video format. On June 11 and 17, 2020, messages, presented using graphics are short and catchy.



The above graphically designed contents are focused on prevention and the medical risks people would face for being reluctant to practice precautionary measures. Both messages are designed to address the mass, or they are tips that the general public should follow.

The first message is to advise by comparing the circumstances before and after the infection with COVID-19. The message developed in what appears to be a warning by telling the possible danger one can face. Then it logically deduces and tries to convince the audience that protecting oneself will help maintain the safety of the masses. In terms of content, the message is designed to communicate the general aspect of the pandemic. Therefore, the message was developed by including warning tones and calls for the common good to reach out to the mass.

Unlike the previous one, the second post is designed to address specific common mistakes made while using a mask. This message is more likely focused on delivering the idea through pictures. The pictures are designed to depict what way-wearing mask is wrong and right. According to interviewee number, five such messages were designed after observing gaps in implementing prevention mechanisms.

“...many of our messages consider these conditions. Look, when we design a message, we start by looking the gap in the society. Therefore, we design a message that can fix that specific problem. This made the public take better care of itself.”

The other approach used by the ministry to increase the exposure of posts is by addressing specific parts of the community by developing specific messages. Interviewee number three further affirms this approach but also mentions a lack of consistency.

“While preparing messages, first we identify the targeted community and design messages based on social makeup of that community. Therefore, messages should be prepared based the type of the society we are addressing.”

The researcher observed that such messages are prepared following some social assortments, and they are few in number. On May 4 and April 6, 2020, the MoH’s Facebook page posted the following message addressing a specific segment of the community:



These two messages address two specific sections of the community, which are Muslims and pregnant mothers.

According to scholars (Motion, Heath, & Leitch, 2016), social media allows people to create and share their own narratives about themselves. This can be used to manage or influence how others perceive them. It can also be used by organizations, such as businesses, to target individuals with tailored messages based on the identities they project online.

Therefore, the MoH's posts on May 4, 2020, targeted the Muslim community. What makes this message more unique is that it has been designed and posted during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Beyond addressing the Muslim community, this message can also engage more people from multi-level social classifications (female, male, religious leaders, young people, etc.) who are Muslim.

The second post similarly addresses a specific segment of the community, which are pregnant women. In fact, the movement of people was highly affected during the pandemic. Especially there was a fear to go to health institutions where probably COVID-19 patients would be admitted. This message is not only about pregnant women; it is about the baby in their belly; it is about ensuring the safety of the coming generation.

In general, regarding content development, the ministry designed its message in three ways. The first approach is addressing general issues for the general public. This is the kind of message that everyone received. The second approach is addressing specific issues for the general public. Through this approach, a single aspect of COVID-19 was communicated to the masses. The third approach addresses a specific segment of the community that is made up of different types of identities (religion, sex, and profession) with specific content.

4.4.2. Facebook Based Enhancers

4.4.2.1. Facebook Booster

Boosted posts are ads that a user creates from existing posts on his or her Facebook page. When a specific page boosts a post, it can choose to target it to specific demographics, interests, and behaviors. The user can also set a budget for his or her boost, and Facebook will show your ad to the people who are most likely to be interested in it. Boosted posts can help you get more

engagement with your page, such as more likes, comments, and shares. They can also help to reach new people who are likely interested in a specific page or business. This feature has been provided to the Ministry of Health by Meta as part of its support for COVID-19, according to interviewee number two.

...the company has offered us a service that enable us to get more views (booster) to support our effort. As a result, the messages we post are seen by at least two hundred thousand Facebook users per day.

As part of Meta's support, the company also enabled MoH to have special tag on Facebook, whenever the ministry post about COVID.

Beyond that, after talking with Facebook Company we are able to get a COVID-19 tag for our posts. Then after Facebook allowed us to use a separate especial tag called COVID-19 Ethiopia. This feature has enabled our Facebook page to be noticed easily across the platform.

During the early days of the pandemic, Facebook provided a special tag for legitimate bodies that provided information about COVID-19. Primarily, this tag is used to indicate the authenticity of the information and the legitimacy of the provider. Nevertheless, according to interview number two, beyond fighting fake information, the tag has enabled posts on MoH's page to be recognized easily.

In fact, having a sign by the owners of the platform as legitimate authority in providing information about COVID-19 would lead people to trust and visit it again and again. Nearly in the same year, the MoH's Facebook page was verified and received the blue tag. In addition, during those early days of the Corona virus, people were panicking; therefore, they were more likely to look at a post flagged as COVID-19. Coupled with the pandemic situation and the features of Facebook used to increase the exposure of posts about COVID-19.

4.4.3. Format of the Contents

4.4.3.1. Video Format

The format of the content, such as video or photo, has a significant effect on how users engage with it. Video posts encourage users to actively engage by sharing their opinions and comments, while photo posts stimulate passive engagement through liking behavior. These media types represent different levels of media richness, also known as the vividness of online content.

Media richness is an approach that describes how different types of media can be used to communicate information. Richer media, such as video, allows for more communication channels and provides more feedback, which can lead to communication that is more effective. Video posts are more likely to be shared and commented on because they provide a more engaging experience for users.

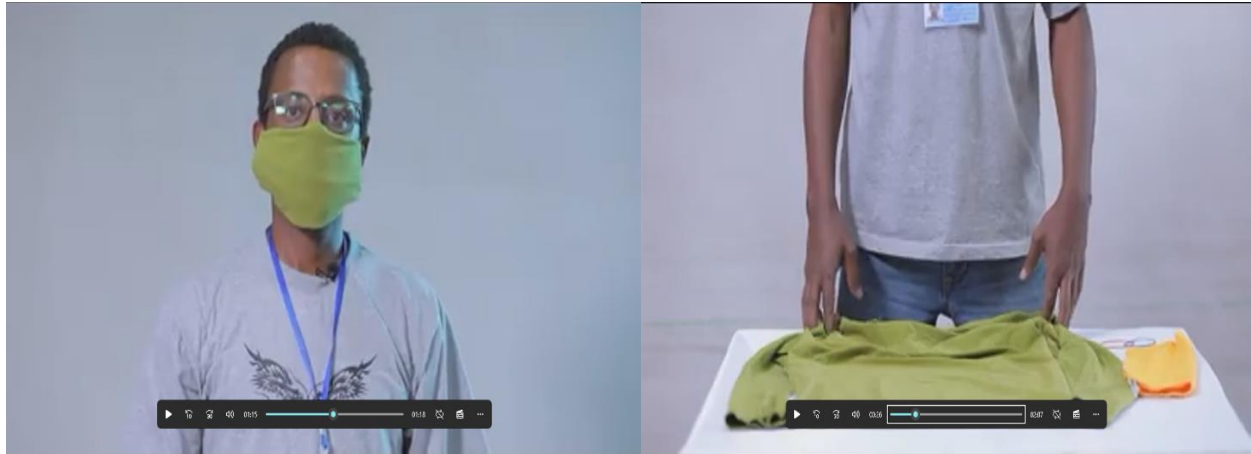
Photo posts, on the other hand, are more likely to be liked because they are a quick and easy way to show support for a brand or product. They are also less likely to be shared or commented on because they do not provide as much information or engagement opportunities as video posts.

Overall, the format of content can have a significant impact on how users engage with it. Video posts are more likely to lead to active engagement, while photo posts are more likely to lead to passive engagement. (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The Ministry of Health largely used text format to present information about COVID-19. However, there is also a significant amount of video and posts designed with graphics. Most of the communication experts interviewed for this research believe that video contents are formats that have more exposure than the rest.

Formats depend on the types of content being served. If the subject is educational, we will use a video. If there are issues that we want people to remember, we use photos. And if they are events, we use text because explanations are needed.

To verify the above claim by interviewee number 2 the researcher has looked in to video formatted contents that are posted on the ministry's Facebook page. On May 14, 2020, the ministry posted a video that illustrate on how to prepare homemade facemasks.



The two and a half-minute video clearly illustrates every step in a way that ordinary people can understand. The video does not just explain how to do it; rather, it displays practical aspects that can be easily implemented. The professional who explains how on the video further states the necessity to practice other precautionary measures apart from wearing a facemask.

The video is a simple production; what is displayed and what is being told by the narration have been well synchronized, which makes it easy for the spectators to follow. Such a short production with creativity would have more exposure since it helps people do things with easily accessible material at home. During the pandemic, such an approach is helpful for those who cannot afford or are unable to access some items needed for protection against the virus.

Apart from that, the ministry tried to treat video messages with some artistic value by involving celebrities from the music and film industries. These celebrities have the potential to increase the exposure of the post through their fans.

The virtual social media community expects that authenticity and truth claims should be balanced by communication that is creative, engaging, and entertaining. (Couldry, 2012). Popular culture is mostly at the center of creative content on social media. The axiom of popular culture is mostly focused on reflecting day-to-day social concerns. (Jenkins et al., 2002) Campaigns and communicative efforts that focus on everyday experiences and popular culture are more likely to connect with the ordinary ways the public experiences the world and have meaning for them.

On June 29, 2020, the MoH's Facebook page posted a music video produced by the National Media and Art Taskforce. The taskforce is under the ministry of health and responsible for organizing the media and art sectors in the effort against the pandemic.



The music video with a reggae rhythm urges the public to follow the advice given by health practitioners against COVID-19. The music further conveys the same message in three local languages. The music video footage also shows the reflection of social activities. Such literary products have the potential to attract the community in different ways. Music by itself has a huge audience; therefore, there is a huge potential to address a greater number of people than the formal approach. Then, music about COVID can also alert the mass to the level of danger posed by the mass.

Similarly, on April 30, 2020, the ministry posted a dramatic video by well-known actors. The message is about avoiding physical contact. The dramatic video is made in a way that is more comic. The short comic video sets out to show that avoiding physical distance is important for everyone; even parents cannot touch their kids without proper cleaning. Being a comic can add an entertaining flavor. Plus, the actors who participated in the video are celebrities from the film

industry. Hence, the approach, coupled with the individuals in the video, would give more exposure to the real message of the post.



On May 22, the MoH's Facebook page also posted a video targeting the Muslim community, as they were about to celebrate Eid al-Fetir. Intuitively, the video-formatted message was prepared to prevent the possible infection of COVID-19 that could be caused by the activities of Holliday. Unlike the previous video we discussed, the narration is not corroborated by the pertinent video footage. Things shown on the video are what people are not supposed to do, so they can avoid infection. However, the producer of the video chose to show what the people are not supposed to do rather than what they should do.

In addition, this video shows people from some Middle Eastern countries as a way to represent Muslims because of their dressing. Such footage could raise questions about the proper representation of the content or about the content itself. The appearance of those people in that footage is nothing like that of Ethiopian Muslims. People wanted to see themselves, or the community they belonged to, in such content. Such misconceptions are caused by a lack of proper planning and the content creator's failure to understand the part of the community he or she is

trying to address. In such cases, the community may find the content offensive rather than educational.



4.4.3.2. Text and Photos

From the outset of the pandemic, the Facebook page of the ministry has been used to post a combination of texts and photos. Relatively, posts prepared using the combination of the two formats are relatively the largest in number. There are also occasions when the photo and text are used separately.

The combination of photos and texts is mostly used for reporting news about events related to COVID-19. Issues of COVID-19 donation, government officials' visits to health centers, situational daily reports of the pandemic, as well as regional response and preparedness, are topics covered in this format.

According to Motion et al. (2016), some of the contents posted in this format are an intruding advertisement for the ministry. Without a proper mechanism, such an approach could result in a negative reaction from the audience. Contents formed by blending photos and text lack purpose. As most of this format is used to report COVID-related news, particularly events, For instance, on May 8, 2020, the following content appeared on the MoH's Facebook page.



Ministry of Health, Ethiopia

May 8, 2020

በደቡብ ክልል ለኮሮና መከላከል ተግባር የተዘገጁ ማዕከላት ተጎበኙ

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በዶ/ር ደረጄ ዱትማ የተመሩት ኃላፊዎቹ የኮሮና ወረርሽኝ በክልሉ እንዳይስፋፋ ዘርፈ ብዙ ተግባራት እየተከናወኑ መሆኑን መገንዘባቸውን ተናግረዋል።

በቀጣይም በክልሉ ያሉ የህክምና ማዕከላትን እና የለይቶ ማቆያ ቦታዎችን በተሟላ የሰው ኃይልና በህክምና መሣሪያዎች በማደራጀት ወረርሽኙን ለመከላከል የበለጠ መዘጋጀት ይገባል ብለዋል።

በደቡብ ክልል 57 የለይቶ ማቆያዎች፣ 34 የማግለያ ማዕከላትና 19 የህክምና መስጫዎች የተዘጋጁ ሲሆን በአስካሁኑ ሂደት በ282 ተጠርጣሪዎች ላይ ምርመራ ተደርጎ በአራት ሰዎች ላይ የኮሮና ቫይረስ ተገኝቷል።



The news is about the visit of government officials to COVID-19 centers in the country’s southern region. Message-wise, the importance of the posted news can be questioned, considering the panic caused by the pandemic across the community.

Content-wise, the post only states the visit of the officials at the COVID-19 centers, which is nothing helpful for the public. This post appears to be what Motion et al. call intruding advertising, as it tries to magnify the officials’ activity, which is visiting centers. Such an approach puts a question mark on the trustworthiness of the page.

What makes this post more problematic is the photo used in line with the news. As it can be seen in the photo, the individuals visiting the center are standing very closely, which is against COVID-19 guidelines. It is this page that posts now and again, urging the public to maintain the two-meter

physical distance. This makes the institution and its Facebook page perceived as self-contradictory. Perhaps it could lead the public to doubt COVID-19 guidelines.

4.5.Public Engagement

Engagement is a key concept in public relations, and it is especially important in the context of social media. The term “engagement” generally refers to some sort of personal connection, productive involvement, or interactive exchange. It is a useful starting point to understand how public relations practices play out on social media. Therefore, engagement is essential for progressive public relations that not only advances institutional priorities but also those of society. (Gulerman & Ayaydin, 2017)

When people engage in certain ways, they are more likely to remember the message and adhere to it. Engagement also helps to spread the word about a brand and generate leads. There are a number of ways to increase engagement on social media. It is possible to increase engagement by responding to comments and questions in a timely and helpful manner. In addition, an online survey would give organizations insight into what the public wants.

Engagement is an essential part of any successful public relations strategy. By understanding how to engage with an audience on social media, one can build relationships and spread the word about one’s message. (Kent, 2013)

The Ministry of Health has done very little to interact with its social media audience, particularly on Facebook. Despite Facebook's enabling features to engage with audiences, the ministry has maintained only one-direction communication on its Facebook page. Engaging and involving the audience has not been in place, except for a couple of online surveys, according to public relations and communication practitioners interviewed for this thesis.

To be honest, we never monitor feedbacks. There are comments under the posts that will be considered if they are very significant. However, we have never followed up and responded regularly. Rather we monitor other Medias to correct if there are fake information or wrong understanding about corona.

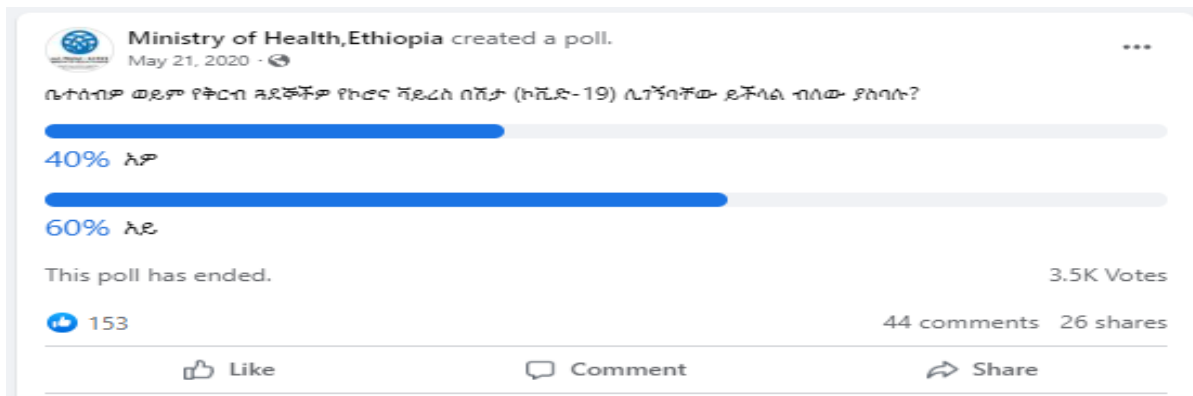
In fact, the ministry has a media monitoring team; however, the team focuses on addressing the issue of fake information. One of the mechanisms to engage the community on Facebook is by responding to specific relevant feedback or by responding in mass to feedback with similar contents. The response can be given directly in the comment section or in the post section by designing a message in a way that can address a number of feedbacks. Nevertheless, according to the above quote from interviewee number five, the ministry has never monitored comments on its Facebook page.

One of the reasons for not responding to the comments or for not engaging the public is a lack of understanding of the importance of interacting with the audience.

We have very few moments that we responded based on our audience's feedback. The reason that we do not respond to comments is that there are many of them. On the other hand, most of the time, people do not give comments that can serve as an input, they rather express their own feelings.

What we can understand from the above quote from interviewee number five is that the communication and PR experts do not understand the importance of engaging the community. The interviewee also states, "They would *rather express their feelings.*" The experts misunderstand that the very feeling of the audience is an important element in understanding what kind of audience they are dealing with. In other words, the practitioner has no or very little understanding of their audience.

Despite the gaps in public engagement, a couple of efforts have been made to engage with the audience. On May 21, 2020, the ministry launched a poll to understand what people thought about whether their families or friends could be caught by COVID-19 or not.



About 3500 people have taken part in the pole, which is a significant amount to gain insight into the public’s understanding. Such an approach is helpful to clarify what kind of message we should prepare. This is one of the important tools to provide tailored and specific messages for specific subject matter.

Communication that connects meaningfully with the public has the potential to drive change, regardless of the communication direction. Engagement efforts in social media require that organizations listen to citizens and then embed citizens’ concerns into the changes they intend to achieve. One-way communication was associated with press agents and propaganda. In contrast, two-way communication was positioned as superior because, even when “asymmetrical,” it was a kind of engagement. (John N., 2013) Therefore, the ministry’s lack of engagement with citizens has led it to miss the ultimate change it brought across society.

4.6. Major Themes Analysis

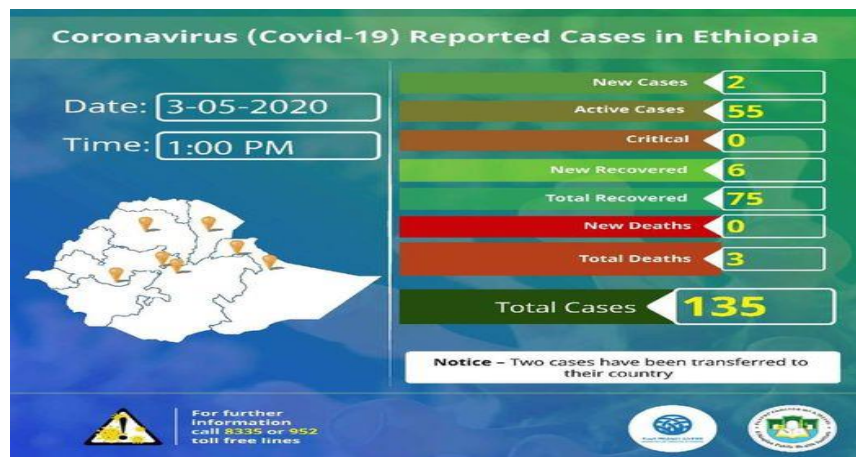
After studying the post gathered from the MoH’s Facebook page, the researcher has classified the content of the post into six categories. These categories of content could appear in the form of text, video, or graphics.

4.6.1. Update

This category of content has two subcategories depending on how and what information it includes. Accordingly, the two categories are daily and situational updates.

4.6.1.1. Daily Update

This category of content mostly contains statistics, particularly the number of new cases, deaths, recoveries from the disease, active cases, total deaths, and total cases.




The post is a static form, and only numbers change daily. This information is posted on a daily basis. The post is like a tip for quick readers. The post has very short notification at the bottom, which is to inform exceptional information if there is any. However, the researcher has noticed one error at the notification spot. The notification remained similar since March 2020, which says *‘two cases have been transferred to their country.’* This notification has remained similar for at least five months.

The background colors and the graphic design have made the post easily noticeable. One could easily identify what it is by looking at just the colors. There is also a three-digit phone number and logo of the Ministry of Health as well as the Ethiopian Institute of Public Health.

4.6.1.2.Situational Update

Situational updates are also information updated daily. Unlike the daily update, this one has detailed information about the daily situation.



Notification Note on COVID-19 Situational Update

The total laboratory tests conducted within 24 hours are 2,926; of these eighty-five (85) of them are confirmed positive for COVID-19 and the total confirmed cases as of today are 1,257. Among the confirmed cases, 51 of them are male and 34 are female and their age ranges from 1 months old to 65 years. All of the confirmed cases are Ethiopians. Among the cases, seventy-two (72) of them are identified from Addis Ababa, four (4) from Tigray region, five (5) from Oromia region, one (1) from Amhara and three (3) from Somali region.


The potential sources of exposure of the confirmed cases are presented below;

Potential Exposure	Number of Cases
Travel history from abroad	19
Known contact with confirmed cases	18
Cases with no known contact with confirmed cases and no travel history	48
Total	85

Unfortunately, A 30 years old Ethiopian male that was in intensive care treatment at Eka Kotebe Hospital and had prior chronic illness has passed away yesterday. This brings the total death related to COVID-19 in our country to Twelve (12). Ministry of Health and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute would like to pass its condolences to the families.

Furthermore, eight (8) people from (3 from Oromia region and 5 from Addis Ababa) recovered from the disease bringing the total number of recoveries 217.

The laboratory samples were collected from the high-risk community members, returnees/passengers at mandatory quarantine centers, contacts of the confirmed cases, health facility visitors and suspects at isolation centers.



COVID-19 Situational Update as of Today

Total laboratory test conducted	112,377
Laboratory tests conducted within 24 hours	2926
Number of Confirmed cases within 24 hours	85
Total active cases	1,026
Patients in severe condition	4
Newly Recovered	8
Total Recovered	217
Total Deaths	12
Returned to their country	2
Total confirmed cases as of today	1257

Considering the increase in transmission of COVID-19, the Ministry of Health and Ethiopian Public Health Institute would like the public to strictly adhere to all precaution measures. We need to be reminded that every single action we take determines the risk of contracting the virus. Therefore, we should:

- Maintain physical distancing
- Wash our hands with water and soap frequently
- Stay at home and avoid mass gatherings
- Cover our mouth and nose with face/cloth mask when going outdoors

For more information or to report if any person had contact with confirmed COVID-19 please call to the free toll line 8335 and 952 or to regular phone 0118276796 and regional toll free lines, or use our email: ephiecc@gmail.com.

Dr. Lia Tadesse
Minister of Health
June 1, 2020

As we can see from the above post on June 1, 2020, the situational update starts providing information about the number of tested people for COVID-19 and, out of that, the number of infected people in 24 hours. Then it went on to provide detailed information by mentioning the

number of infections in terms of regions, age, and gender. After that, it classifies the number of infected people based on the situation in which they are infected (whether they have a travel history or contact with a confirmed case) and continues explaining about recovered and deceased people.

After explaining the data in terms of different factors, it brings a logically deduced closing paragraph advising the public to strictly adhere to all precautionary measures. This comes after showing the fact that all data indicate an increase in transmission.

The situational update is a 24-hour brief that can show the trajectory of the pandemic in different aspects. The brief has measured important aspects of the pandemic, such as local transmission and the presence of corona in terms of demography and geography, and it also shows the chance of recovery and death. The detailed information is very helpful for a literate average person as well as experts who study the subject matter.

4.6.2. Preparedness and Response

This is what the MoH's PR practitioner posted as news on the Facebook page of the ministry. This category of posts mostly includes government officials visiting COVID-19 centers and explanations of the preparations conducted for the pandemic. The majority of the news indicates the success achieved by different levels of government structure in regards to preparation and response. Some of the success stories are tangible and can be considered impressive. The following post on June 2, 2020 is one of the examples.

“በሀገራችን ኢትዮጵያ የኮሮና ቫይረስ በሽታ የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ ባለመኖሩ ወደ ደቡብ አፍሪካ ናሙናዎችን እየተላከ ውጤቱን ለማወቅ የጊዜና የገንዘብ ወጪ ያስከትል እንደነበር ይታወሳል። የጤና ሚኒስቴር ይህን ችግር በመረዳት በአጭር ጊዜ በአገር ውስጥ የመመርመሪያ መሳሪያዎችን በሚሟላት እና ባለሙያዎችን በማሰልጠን የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ ማዕከላትን አደራጅቷል። እስከ ግንቦት 24 ቀን 2020 ዓ.ም ድረስ 112,377 ሰዎች የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ የተከናወነ ሲሆን ይህም በአገር አቀፍ ደረጃ በአጭር ጊዜ የኮሮና ቫይረስ (ኮቪድ19) በሽታ የላብራቶሪ ምርመራ አቅም እየጨመረ እንደሚገኝ ያሳያል።....”

“It is recalled that due to the lack of laboratory tests for the corona virus in our country, samples were sent to South Africa to find out the results, which cost time and money.

Understanding this problem, the Ministry of Health organized laboratory-testing centers in a short period by supplying diagnostic equipment and training professionals. As of May 24, 2020, 112,377 people tested domestically, which shows that the capacity of COVID - 19 testing laboratory is increasing at the national level.”

COVID-19 Laboratory Testing Centers and Candidates in Ethiopia				
S.N	Laboratory Name	Region	City/Town	Status
1	Ethiopian Public Health Institute(4 Labs)	Addis Ababa	Addis Ababa	Functional
2	Arneur Hansen Research Institute	Addis Ababa	Addis Ababa	Functional
3	National Animal Health Diagnostic and Investigation Center (NAHDIC)	Oromia	Sebeta	Functional
4	Tigray Health Research Institute	Tigray	Mekelle	Functional
5	Adama Public Health Research and Referral Laboratory	Oromia	Adama	Functional
6	Amhara Public Health Institute-Bahirdar	Amhara	Bahirdar	Functional
7	Haramaya University	Oromia and Harari	Harar	Functional
8	SNNPR Public Health Institute	SNNPR	Hawassa	Functional
9	Addis Ababa Public Health Research and Emergency Management Center	Addis Ababa	Addis Ababa	Functional
10	Gonder University	Amhara	Gonder	Functional
11	Arsi University	Oromia	Assela	Functional
12	Afar Public Health Institute	Afar	Semera	Functional
13	Jigjiga University	Somali	Jigjiga	Functional
14	Amhara Public Health Institute-Dessie	Amhara	Dessie	Functional

This is, in fact, a success story. The country that never tested a disease like that was able to install more than 33 laboratories in a couple of months. The presented content is the right one to promote the institute; however, the presentation has not considered the platform. In line with the list of laboratories table, the post needed a couple of pictures of the mentioned laboratories. Doing so would make the post more conceivable.

The above post contains figures that could bring more recognition for the ministry on social media, but the presentation format has reduced this potential.

On the other hand, there are a bunch of posts that have similar stories and characters. These posts mainly related to the visits of officials to the regional COVID-19 centers. The following post from June 14, 2020, is an example.

The work being done in terms of prevention and control of Corona virus in Harari region is encouraging.

“The delegation led by the state minister of health, Dr. Dereje Duguma, visited activities being carried out to prevent and control COVID-19 in the Hariri region.

He visited five different quarantine and treatment centers and two laboratory-testing centers in the region today. He said he observed that encouraging activities are being carried out to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the region, especially in terms of working jointly with stakes.

The Minister of State, Dr. Dereje Duguma, said during the visit that the work being done in the isolation and treatment centers in the region is encouraging. However, the apathy and carelessness seen among the community should be corrected quickly.”

Wherever a visit is conducted by an official, the whole structure of the post is similar. The first couple of paragraphs state how the preparedness and response efforts are encouraging by quoting the visiting government official. The following paragraphs mention the specific facilities visited by the official and again explain how encouraging things are. Finally, the post concluded with some sort of criticism by the same officials. Almost all text posts that talk about officials visiting somewhere follow the same structure.

Such an approach will lead the audience to question the trustworthiness of the Facebook page of the ministry. Since there is no way that, all the centers visited by the state minister would be given similar comments. Moreover, even though they were given similar comments, the presentation as well as the structure of the information sorted out should be dynamic.

4.6.3. Donations

Posts in this thematic content category directly deal with donations given by local and international stakeholders to fight the pandemic. Most of this category serves to inspire others to do the same as well as to acknowledge those who are lending their hand.

As most of the handover of the donation takes place in ceremonial assortments, the posts in this category are written in a formal news style. Almost the entire donation is written in a similar structure.

Laboratory equipment worth more than 1.3 million birr donated

“Ray Import and Export Pvt. Ltd. has handed over the laboratory test equipment used for corona protection to the Ministry of Health today.

During the handover, the representative of the Ministry of Health, Mr. Yacob Seman, said that the support provided will be used for the corona disease isolation and treatment centers. He...

The Deputy Manager of Ray Import and Export Pvt. Ltd. Ms. Yordanos Berhanu said that the laboratory test equipment and medical equipment that donated to the Ministry of Health can be used in any situation and can quickly determine the results of health tests. She said that... the company will continue to provide the necessary support in preventing and controlling Corona.”

“Nisir Microfinance donated screening machines worth half a million birr to the Ministry of Health.”

“During the handover, the Minister of Health, Dr. Dereje Duguma thanked the coordinated efforts to prevent and control the corona epidemic...”

Dawit Waqqari, the manager of Nisir Microfinance, said that the total amount of support provided is half a million birr, and the donated devices are equipped with... “

As we can see from the above content posted on June 15, 2020, it starts by stating that the handover event happened between the ministry’s representative and the donor. Then it quotes the ministry’s representative, and this is followed by the donor’s statement; sometimes the event is reported in reverse order. Therefore, the style of writing is static while reporting the donation news.

The other aspect observed by the researcher is the amount of information or paragraph provided for each donation. Some of the donation news is covered in two paragraphs, and some is covered in more than four paragraphs. For instance, let us look at the above content posted on June 15 and the post from June 5.

The Ethiopian Trust Fund donated materials used to prevent the corona virus for the Ministry of Health.

“Health Minister Dr. Lia Tades said that the donation is a great resource to reinforce the efforts to prevent the epidemic. She also mentioned that the resource mainly used for the health professionals.

Chair of the Ethiopian Trust Fund Board of Directors, Ato Zafu Eyesuswork, said that the preventive equipment purchased for 40 million birr. Ato Zafu also stated that the Ethiopian Trust Fund will continue supporting Ethiopian in any action to prevent the virus.”

Comparing both posts, the one posted on June 15 explained more in more than four paragraphs, and the amount of the donation is 1.5 million birr. While the one posted on June 5 was reported only in two paragraphs and the amount of the donation was forty million birr. Therefore, there is a problem with prioritizing the news by setting some parameters. Since one of the purposes of reporting a donation report is to acknowledge the donors, the one with forty million dollars is supposed to receive a detailed post.

The news of the donation also suffered from a repetitive idea crammed into one post. This is a direct lack of understanding or identification of the important points by the communicator.

In general, a lack of dynamic writing skills, missing important points, and a deficiency in giving the right weight to where it is due have made the writing mostly unfit for the ministry’s Facebook page.

4.6.4. Educational Content

This category deals with contents that inform the audience about the preventive measures against the COVID-19 virus. The experience of people who have been infected by the virus is one of the approaches. This is a kind of content produced by involving an audience with real-life experience of the disease. This approach is where audience engagement is activated, and it is a way to create valuable interaction. The category also includes educational posts designed graphically and short videos.

However, during the three months selected for this research, the ministry has produced two articles of this kind. The first content was posted on May 6, 2020. The 26-minute video is about the story of a family member who recovered from the Corona virus. The video was attractive, and the guy told anecdotes in a very orderly way. The video, unlike any other post on the ministry’s page, can depict the risk people will face for neglecting protection and hope to avoid panic in society. This brings the human story to light, which likely attracts the community and makes sense of what they are advised to do.

Again, on May 23, the Facebook page posted the fact that a healthy baby was born from a COVID-19-infected and critically ill mother. Despite the mother's infection status, the child tested negative. While telling about this unusual phenomenon, the writing mixed about the precautions needed for children against Corona. Such a happening is a moment that brings potential exposure to the institutions. However, the success of utilizing the circumstances depends on how the issue is addressed. Using it for mere popularity would obviously fire back. While the opposite would result in a positive outcome. Beyond all such happenings, maintain the hope of the community, which gives them the reason to go forward.

The Ministry of Health's Facebook has threatened the happening in a way that we can call proper but has not utilized the huge potential the incident contains. Talking to this mother and medical professional to produce a short video would have created more influence. However, the way the ministry's Facebook threatened the incident using text is good. The way they blend other issues of COVID-19 with the story is very smooth.

In messages from any public relations institution, people want to see themselves or what represents them so they can relate to what is conveyed. The pregnant mother's case at Yeka Hospital is a situation that can create such influence. Therefore, the task of public relations includes sniffing happenings they can bend to their favor.

On the other hand, there are informative and educational contents designed with computer graphics. These posts are pictures with very few text expressions. The graphic design of these posts has a similar background color of light blue. As this background color is used repeatedly to present the daily update, it is likely associated with COVID-19. The following post from June 17, 2020, contains both pictures and text expressions. The pictures in this post are designed to educate the audience on the proper ways to put on facemasks. Beyond the sketches, there is no textual expression. The two pictures contain commonly understandable signs (\checkmark and X), which indicate the correct and wrong ways to use a facemask. Such expressions have the potential to be understood by illiterate members of the community.



The other post is from April 11 which intended depict the importance of maintaining physical distance to prevent COVID-19 contraction. The post appears that its message most likely understood by literate people. One of the reasons for this conclusion is that the sketch on this post does not indicate what is right and wrong unlike the post on June 17. The sketch on April 11 post is difficult to decide what the sketch is about. Therefore, there is more textual explanation to make the message clear. That means the illiterate have less possibility to understand the post.



The educational contents also produced in video formats. Beyond showing practical aspect of prevention measures, the video format educative messages enabled the ministry to reach out the blind people by inserting sign languages.

4.6.5. Misinformation and Fake Information

Apart from its multifaceted advantage, the social media has increased the pace misinformation and fake information spread. Especially during COVID-19 pandemic, this pace has increased more and the amount of incorrect information was increasing immensely. (Lelisho et al. 2020)

Similarly, as any of its counter bodies across the world the Ethiopian Ministry of Health challenged by the presence of incorrect information. In Ethiopia to avoid the causality of wrong information, the ministry has followed three approaches. The first approach is that from the outset, it was announced through different local media that the Ministry of Health and EPHI are the only bodies that can provide information about the pandemic. This is about to delegitimize others, except the two government organizations.

The second approach is by working Meta, in eradicating Facebook accounts that misinform the public and disseminate wrong information according to interviewee number two. Facebook accounts that impersonate MoH has been reported to Meta and those accounts were deactivated. That action by the Facebook has immensely reduce the appearance fake Facebook pages. In addition, the ministry's Facebook page provided a verification badge, so that people can distinguish it from the fake one.

The third approach is the preparation of counter information. The counter information provided based on what false information disseminated according to interviewee number one.

“...For example, information about the traditional cure for COVID-19 was widely disseminated on Facebook. By stating the incorrectness of the information, we have made the community aware of the guidelines of the World Health Organization. Another misinformation that was circulating was about the COVID-19 vaccine. In order to correct the distorted information, we have showed different social recognized people taking the vaccine.”

During three months in 2020, the period this researcher focused on, the ministry has only responded or countered three wrong information claims.

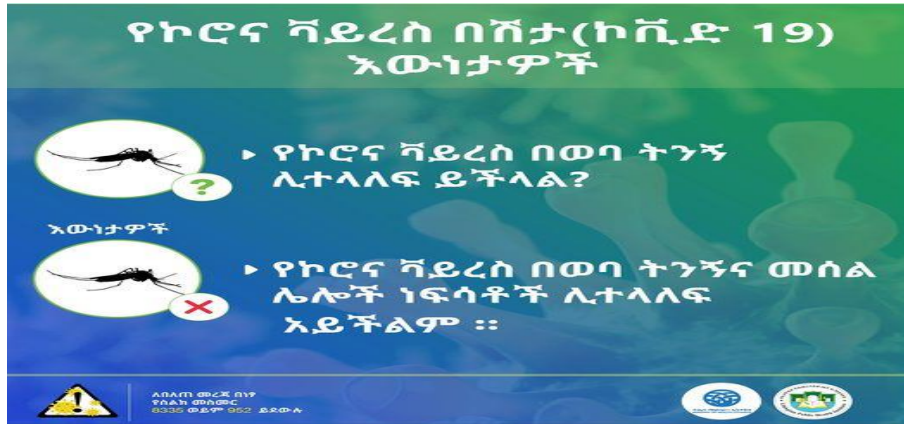
In April 26, 2020 Reporter newspaper claimed that Yeka hospital's 109 beds has fully occupied by COVID-19 patients. Since the hospital cannot accommodate anymore, patients transferred to St. Paul hospital. The news published online as well as in hard copy on its Sunday edition. The ministry responded after one day to the incorrect information, which is very late considering the circumstance across the country. The communication experts were not prone to media and this is a sign of weak media monitoring. The ministry then responded by mentioning that the information reported by the newspaper is incorrect. Then the statement followed by listing the correct facts and figures of the hospitals. It also announces the fact that the newspaper would publish the correction.

The ministry also designed to correct the unscientific belief or rumors among the society regarding the pandemic. The belief or rumors circulating among the society are the kind that can create negligence or panic. Both situations can exacerbate the damage the pandemic can create. In April 27, the ministry posted the following posts.



The above post message is to avoid negligence behavior that emanate from believe that COVID-19 virus cannot exist in hot climate. That means the community believes cold climate is the only favorable climate the virus can sustain. The counter post for this believes presented with the statement tuned with confirmation. The post state “it is confirmed that the virus can survive in all type of climate.” The statement written with tone claiming the stated information as a new finding. Which means there also another aspect that is not yet clear about the virus. Such tone somewhat will trigger fear but also avoid negligence.

On April 30, the ministry posted a message that would reduce panic. The post intended to inform the public that Malaria or other insects could not transmit the virus.



This is a sort information intended to check fact. The post first asks, “Can corona transmitted by mosquito? Then in the second line, it answers, “The corona virus cannot be transmitted by mosquito or other insects.” The interjection approach is like informing the unique things about the subject matter.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

5.1. Summary

This study was conducted with the purpose of examining how the Ministry of Health's PR practitioners manage and use social media platforms. The study has examined how the Facebook page of the ministry was used and managed during the COVID-19 pandemics. Particularly, the researcher tries to investigate how PR practitioners try to create knowledge transfer through connections and approaches used to increase the exposure of posts. Mechanisms employed to enable public engagement as well as contents entertained during the pandemic were analyzed by this research.

This study looked at how content was created, how it was presented, and the significance of the topics covered on the ministry's Facebook page. Moreover, how PR and communication practitioners conduct themselves was also the subject of this research. The social media integration and content theories are used as the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The study was conducted on the Ministry of Health's Facebook page from April 9, 2020, to July 7, 2020, where posts about the COVID-19 pandemic were selected by purposive sampling. The research employed qualitative methods to analyze the contents of the Facebook post samples. In-depth interviews with key informants in the public relations and communication departments of the ministry were also used to support content analysis through interpretations of the views of the informants to address different aspects of the issue.

It has been more than nine years since the Ministry of Health adopted Facebook as part of its PR and communication strategy. The fast-growing number of people who use Facebook is the reason behind adopting the platform. The ministry's PR and communication department staff has no formal training on how to operate a Facebook page. All of the interviewed practitioners have their own personal Facebook accounts, and that is how they develop their understanding.

The finding has revealed that the ministry used its Facebook page to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly focusing on reaching out to the literate section of the community. From the outset, the ministry targeted bringing about behavioral change by providing health information

through Facebook. During the pandemic, the ministry's Facebook page was mainly dominated by COVID-19-related issues.

To spread its posts about COVID-19 across the platform, the ministry has used its networks of advocates, who are already connected to the ministry as part of the government structure (regional, zonal, and district health bureaus). Apart from this, the Ministry of Health and EPHI were declared by the government to be the only information providers following the outbreak of the pandemic. That means any stakeholder would share or quote what is provided by the two organizations whenever they deal with the pandemic; therefore, that is another enforcing factor for the ministry to spread its message.

The ministry also tries to increase its reach out to an ordinary audience by developing contents that deal with the day-to-day challenges of the public as well as inspire change; however, they are dominated by the other themes.

The researcher has interviewed the communication practitioners as well as looked at the data collected from the ministry's Facebook page to understand the approach used to increase the exposure of messages. To enhance the exposure level of the posts, the contents were developed in a way that they could address the general public as well as specific sections of the community. For the general public, the message is designed to mention common factors, laws, mistakes, or any other aspects. While addressing certain parts of the community, the message is directly attached to some kind of social assortment, such as holidays or something they can hold dear.

Technological instruments are also used to increase the exposure of posts about COVID-19. The ministry also used Facebook Booster to increase the exposure of its posts. These posts helped reach hundreds of thousands of people who were not followers but interested in the topic. The PR practitioners also produce video-formatted content to attract a larger audience. In fact, video-formatted messages attract a larger audience on Facebook. (Hutchinson, 2023) The combination of text and photo is also used for the same cause. However, the combination lacks professional touch, and sometimes the posts create an unwanted interpretation.

Facebook is one of the most feasible platforms to engage the public. However, the ministry's Facebook page has shown very little performance. Apart from a few polls, the ministry has no plan or strategy to engage the public through its Facebook page.

In terms of content, the study has found five major themes: COVID-19 update, preparedness and response, donations, education, and fighting misinformation and fake information.

In terms of writing, the study has found a lack of a dynamic writing style that can fit on social media platforms. After analyzing certain text and formatted posts, the writing style is inclined toward the usual government media writing style, which is boring.

5.2. Conclusion

Social media are becoming ubiquitous and important for communication purposes. However, social media are substantially different from traditional or other online media due to their network structure and their egalitarian nature. As such, they require a distinct approach to management.

During the pandemic, the Ministry of Health is in a position to create connections forcibly and spread information, as it is one of the two authorities that can provide information concerning the pandemic. This was not created by the communication strategy but rather by the circumstances. However, efforts were in place to spread messages by developing community-oriented contents in different formats as well as using advocates of networks. As a government organization, some of the community-oriented contents that inspire change as well as that shade of light on the day today's communal challenge are dominated by the contents publicizing the government's effort.

In terms of enhancing message exposure, the ministry Facebook page focused on designing specific messages for specific sections of the community. Such a message is mostly attached to what the community holds dearest or values they adhere to. Using different types of content presentation formats (video, text, graphics, and combinations of text and photo) and involving celebrities in the making of videos were part of the strategy, which directly increased the exposure of the content. However, a lack of professional touch in using photos in combination has led the posts to carry the wrong message.

Regarding public engagement, the ministry's Facebook page has done little or none. That means the PR and communication practitioners operate the Facebook page not in an interactive way, which could result in the loss of audience and hamper the virility of content, according to social media integration theory.

Considering feedback from audiences can communicate the fact that their ideas and interests matter. Garcia's theory assumes that the interactive process could result in a full duplex of information and a similarly increment of audience.

However, contrary to the theory's assumption, the Ministry of Health Facebook page with no or very little interaction activity has been able to garner millions of audiences after the outbreak of the pandemic, which used to have tens of thousands before the pandemic. From this, the researcher concludes that, apart from strategic approaches, circumstances could play an immense role in increasing the number of followers or audience. In the case of the MoH's Facebook page, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the privilege given to the ministry as a sole information provider have created fertile circumstances for the increase in Facebook followers. Therefore, one could make its Facebook page more popular, accessible, or dominant if it acts within the right circumstances. However, this does not mean the strategic approaches informed by Garcia are useless. Rather, employing the approaches of Garcia in the situation we explained earlier would make the institution's Facebook page exponentially successful.

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Appendices

Appendix-1

In-depth interview questions for the PR and communication department staff of the ministry of Health.

1. How long have you served in your current position?
2. Level of education
3. What is the main objective of the MoH's Facebook page?
4. How do you explain your knowledge about social media?
5. Tell us the role of social media in combating COVID-19 Pandemic in Ethiopia?
6. How do you maximize the shareability of the contents posted on the official Facebook page of MoH? If you tried any mechanism as ministry of health, please explain?
7. What are the factors do you consider to increase the extent contents shared across social media platform?
8. How do you measure the extent your post shared by followers and beyond?
9. Can you mention any moment that your post being shared by large number of followers and by others? Could you explain factors that leads to that result?
10. What have you done to enhance the trust of your Facebook followers?
11. Explain your strategy to make your contents about COVID-19 viral/popular on Facebook or other social media? Explain the outcome of this strategy.
12. Do you think content development would affect the virility/exposure degree of the posted content? How?
13. What is the most viral post on ministry's Facebook page? Why that specific post become viral? Do you think the level of creativity, and the effort to involve audience has caused the virility of the posted content? If yes how?
14. How do you examine the implication and reason of the virility of your contents?

15. How do you determine the objective of specific post?
16. Could you explain what specific objectives you have set while posting COVID-19 related items? How do you know whether the post hit the target or not?
17. How do you monitor the audience's feedback on Facebook? Explain how you respond to the feedback.
18. How do you use the feedback to guide your future activities on Facebook?
19. How do you engage followers of the page on certain topic? Have you ever produced content following Facebook user's engagement with MoH page? Can you explain the reception of the specific content?
20. How do you entertain public comments or contribution to reinforce the task of the institution?
21. How did you respond to misinformation about COVID-19 on Facebook as a ministry? Is there preventive fact checking mechanism? If there is any, can you explain the operation in terms of time wise and authenticity.
22. How do you ensure COVID-19 contents authenticity before posting on social networks? What is the role of health and communication professionals?
23. What do you think about involving some creativity and amusement while presenting facts or some other information about COVID-19? Have you tried such approach as a ministry? If you do please, mention one specific moment and explain the outcome?
24. How do you analyze the impact of your social media page among the followers and beyond?
25. How do you explain the know-how gap regarding the management of the ministry's Facebook page?
26. How do you address technical difficulties that prevent the ultimate utilization of Facebook page? What solutions can you suggest?
27. What is the nature of messages conveyed about COVID-19 pandemic?

28. Do you think the format (video, graphics...) of the content can affect the reachability of the message across social media? Explain how? If it's no explain why?
29. How do you explain the ministry's approach in adding creativity on COVID-19 posts?
30. Tell us your thought regarding the ministry's Facebook content development on COVID-19.
31. How do you utilize professional groups, online community and celebrities in informing the wider population about the pandemic?
32. What are the challenges faced by PR professionals while using Facebook?

Appendix-2

Coding Sheet Name of the news channel _____

Post Date (date/month/year) _____

Content Format _____

Content Categories

1- Update _____

A- Daily Update _____

B- Situational Update _____

2- Preparedness and Response _____

3- Donations _____

4- Educational Content _____

5- Misinformation and Fake Information _____

Appendix-3

Coding Guide

- 1- Update:** if the post talks about daily updates of infected people in a form of table or written texts.

Daily Update: the post just deals with the numbers of people infected, death, recovered, critical cases in a table form.

Situational Update: the post gives detailed situation of the pandemic. Particularly how the infection happened, the condition death, and any mothed details about the pandemic.

- 2- Preparedness and Response:** any effort conduct by government at different level of administration to combat the pandemic.
- 3- Donations:** any gift from any stakeholder to the government in the effort combat COVID-19
- 4- Educational Content:** any content that explain protective measures and how to make any items needed to fight COVID-19 from home available materials.
- 5- Misinformation and Fake Information:** any post that disprove any false claim or any wrong believes across the community.