



**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, LANGUAGE STUDIES,
JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**

**THE PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES OF USING FACEBOOK IN PUBLIC
RELATIONS OF SOME SELECTED BUREAUS OF OROMIA REGION**

BY

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**ATHESIS SUBMITTED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

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DECLARATION

I, Kasahun Tariku declare that this thesis entitled, The Practice and Challenges of Using Facebook in Public Relation of Bureaus of Oromia Region and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Public relations and Strategic Communication is my own original work. I have carried it out independently with guidance and suggestions of my research adviser. And it has not been presented in any other university. All sources materials used for this thesis have been acknowledged.

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**The Practice and Challenges of Using Facebook in Public Relations of Some
Selected Bureaus of Oromia Region**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in bureaus of Oromia Region. Qualitative methodology is used in the study. The data used in the research were collected using semi structured in-depth interview and Facebook content analysis. Purposive sampling is used to select three bureaus from bureaus of Oromia Region. Five public relations practitioners have participated in the in-depth interview. One face to face and four phone call interviews were conducted. The findings indicate that all the selected bureaus use Facebook often as PR tool; however there is more one way communication resulting in less interaction to increase the relationship and foster closer relationship between the organization and its public. Poor internet connection, fake Facebook accounts, dissemination of bureaus information on personal Facebook pages of the officials are among the challenges PR practitioners

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List of acronyms

PR	Public Relations
OCB	Oromia Communication Bureau
OEB	Oromia Education Bureau
OHB	Oromia Health Bureau
UGC	User Generated Content

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Nowadays technology is influencing day to day human activities. We live in the age where social media in modern culture that affect and influence everyone's life. Using social media has increasingly become a part of public relations practitioners' day-to-day work. One way for public relations practitioners to communicate with key publics is through social media networks. Through interactions with stakeholders on Facebook and other social media applications, organizations seek to develop relationships with important publics. (Waters, Burnett, Lambe, & Lucas, 2009, p.103). Public Relations (PR) practitioners must be social media savvy to compete effectively in the working environment. Public relation practitioners are expected to have the knowledge of social media to be successful in their career.

The rise of social media calls for a revision of the common understanding of strategic corporate communication, whereby organizations try to reach an advantage for themselves through long-term monitoring and consciously initiating necessary steps accordingly, towards more interactivity, reciprocity, participation and sociality as well as new applications through technological advancement.(Gisela Gonçalves, Ian Somerville & Ana Melo. 2012, p. 111).

Today we could not deny the impact power of social media in our country specially the Facebook and most people are viewing them, reading them, commenting them, liking them, hating them, deleting them, editing them, believing them and over sharing them without bothering to validate the fact. The impact of this may cause the outcome of our lives directly and indirectly just by the fingertip of the return key.

It is evident that the communication techniques and styles employed offline differ from those required in online settings. For instance, face-to-face communication is synchronous in nature and depends on nonverbal cues. However, online communication emphasizes written communication. Despite the differences, communication exchanges that take place online are equally significant to those that happens offline (Hopkins 2014, p. 3). Thus, understanding and enhancing online communication through social technologies, even in the PR profession and practice, is now inevitable.

Social media involves the use mobile and web-based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse, and adjust user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens& McCarthy, 2011, P.2). Use of the internet and social media networks is widespread among public relations practitioners and comprise important tools in the PR area. Social media helps PR because PR practitioners are able to build more new relationships across a wider landscape and in a sustainable fashion never before possible (Waddel, 2010, p. 9). The widespread use of social media has fundamentally changed how PR practitioners communicate and share information for practice.

Facebook is a social networking site, which was founded in 2004 and is primarily owned by Mark Zuckerberg (Griffith &Liyanage, 2008, p. 76). It was designed to make the world a more accessible and connected place. People use Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family, to explore what is going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.

The increasing number of Facebook users also suggest that the potential for organizations to reach and communicate with a number of publics has also increased commensurately, thereby impacting public relations efforts. Because of the widely-perceived benefits, private and public sector organizations are increasingly using social media for corporate and organizational communication and public relations (PR).Therefore, effective organizational communication must utilize the right social media platform to disseminate a message.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Public relations refer to the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain good will and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.(Institute of Public Relations 2004). It is a profession practiced to build and maintain mutual understanding between organizations and their public in order to help organizations success survive. PR is widely considered as an attempt made to build the image of an organization only. But it strives to build bridges between the organization and its publics so that they can establish good relationships. For organizations to establish and maintain good will of their publics they need to use different communication channels.

Social media is a relatively new phenomenon in the field of public relations, and yet it is having a considerable impact on how organizations communicate with their publics and the everyday practice of public relations (Robson 2013, p.4). Social media presents great opportunities for organizations to communicate with their publics. For public relations, social media are tools to help build relationships among publics. It is easy to upload texts, audios, photos and videos on different social media platforms. It can foster social change in relationships, communities and societies.

The current report (2019) of Facebook shows that there were more than 2.1 billion estimated people monthly use Facebook. Facebook is one of the largest online social networks. Not only common users but also celebrities, politicians and other people of public interest use social media to spread content to others. Most organizations in our country are using Facebook to disseminate information to their publics.

According to Facebook, 5% to 6% of registered Facebook accounts are fake accounts. Facebook clearly states in their *Legal Terms* that users are not allowed to provide fake information and that they must keep their information up to date.

Macnamara and Zerfass (2012, p.289) recently stated that “significant gaps remain in knowledge of how organizations are using social media and how these important new channels of communication can and should be utilized in the context of public relations and corporate communication” suggesting there is still much we are to yet understand about the effects of social media on the profession. A major role of public relations

practitioners is to communicate to their targets to establish and maintain relationships. One, however, wonders if public relations practitioners in Ethiopia have been making good use of this new online communication system to communicate with their target audience.

For an organization to build relationships within the online social sphere, it is fundamental to understand the best approaches for utilizing social technologies to meet the personal goals and needs of a user. Furthermore, there is increasing need for practitioner's to continue working within the frameworks of established practices and culture of a given technology (Wang, Tucker and Rihll, 2011, p. 45). Yet, there are also some negative aspects to social media in public relations. Thus the study will focus on practices and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in some selected bureaus of Oromia Region.

Research Objectives

General Objective

The main objective of this study is to critically analyze the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in selected bureaus of Oromia Region.

Specific Objectives

- To investigate how organizations in the Oromia Regional State are using Facebook in their communication with stakeholders and their publics
- To identify the practices of using Facebook in the organizations
- To identify the challenges of using Facebook in the organizations
- To review how the usage of Facebook changed the way regional bureaus PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders.

1.3. Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following basic questions:

1. How are the bureaus of Oromia Region using Facebook?
2. What are the practices of using Facebook in the organizations?
3. What are the challenges of using Facebook in the organizations?

4. How has the usage of Facebook changed the way PR practitioners and communicators of bureaus of the region engage their publics and stakeholders?

1.4. Significance of the study

Facebook are the new technological phenomena. And there is a shortage of research material about the use of Facebook in Public relations in Ethiopian context. Therefore, the study is significant in providing effective information on the use of Facebook in bureaus of Oromia Regional State

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

The result can also be used as a framework for other researchers to have ground information about the study target regional bureaus and public relations practitioners. The study can also be used as source of material for those who are interested to conduct a relevant study for the enhancement of Facebook in the region as well as in the country.

1.5. Scope of the study

The scope of this study is limited to the practice and challenges of using social media specifically the Facebook in bureaus of Oromia Region. Facebook is picked due to the fact that it was found to be the most popular social networking site for the people in the area of the study in general and to the participants of this study in particular. The thematic scope of the study is limited to the employees of the Public Relations Departments of the selected bureaus: Oromia Communication Bureau, Health Bureau and Education Bureau.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

Due to the current world wide pandemic COVID-19 it was challenging to conduct face to face interview, thus, telephone call interviews were taken as alternative. Social networking sites, especially the Facebook, are recent phenomena, it is under researched, finding relevant resources, particularly significant local resources, for the study was

challenging. The study constrained itself on exploring the Facebook pages of some selected bureaus of Oromia Region. Methodologically the study limits itself to a qualitative method of data analysis.

1.7. Organization of the study

This study is organized in to five chapters. The first chapter deals with the introduction of the research: It sets out the background, statement of the problem, research objective, research question, and significance, scope & limitation of the study. The second chapter provides the literature review of the study. The third chapter holds the methodology part which consist research design, sample size and sampling technique, data types and sources, data collection instruments, data processing and analysis. Chapter four is the analysis and discussion part in which all the data is interpreted and analyze by the researcher. Finally, chapter five deals with the conclusion part of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Overview of social media

Social media refer to internet-based applications and websites that promote the sharing of user-generated content, communication, and participation on a large scale (Cooper, 2015, p. 1). Social media involve the use of mobile and web-based technologies to design highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, create, converse, and adjust User-Generated Content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, & McCarthy, 2011, p. 241). User- Generated Content (UGC) is enabled by Web 2.0, which is a term encompassing a second generation of internet-based and interactive applications that are developed around user-generated and user-adjusted content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009, p. 61), Web 2.0 is a term that is used to illustrate a new way in which software developers and end-users started to exploit the World Wide Web as platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by organizations, but are instead continuously modified by all users in participatory and collaborative fashion. Further they argue that as Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation UGC, which can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media.

Web 2.0 allows for sharing, linking, collaborating, and inclusion of UGC. So users, rather than receiving a lecture through static Web pages, are engaged collectively in a conversation that leads to the generation of online content of collective intelligence. That is, nobody knows everything, but everybody knows something, and what is known can be immediately shared or distributed through Web 2.0 social media applications.

Social media penetration worldwide is ever increasing. In 2019 there are over 269 million Facebook users in India alone making it the leading country in terms of Facebook audience size. To put this into context, if India's Facebook audience were a country then it would be ranked fourth in terms of largest population worldwide. Apart from India, there are several other markets with more than 100 million Facebook users each: The United States, Indonesia, and Brazil with 183 million, 123 million, and 120 million Facebook users respectively. (Internet world Stat, 2020)

As Global Stats of 2020 in Ethiopia Facebook is a leading social media platform. It shows Facebook (56.94%), Pinterest (15.79%), Twitter (13.74%), YouTube (9.29%), Instagram (3.69%) and Telegram (0.27%). There were 6,137,000 Facebook users in Ethiopia in January 2020 which accounted for 5.4% of its entire population.

Several studies looked at social media use by public relations. Wright and Henson did a longitudinal study on the emerging media use in public relations between 2006 and 2013. Findings of the study suggest that public relations practitioners are using more and more social media in their activities. The new tools are providing unique opportunities for both PR professionals and for a wide variety of strategic publics. (Wright and Hinson, 2013, p. 14). They assert:

Results also indicate those who practice public relations believe social and other emerging media continue to improve in terms of accuracy, credibility, honesty, trust and truth telling. They also think these new media effectively serve as a watchdog for traditional news media, impacting corporate and organizational transparency and advocating a transparent and ethical culture.

Fundamental to good public relations practice are: integrity; honest and responsible regard for the public interest; Checking the reliability and accuracy of information before dissemination. (Rob Brown, 2009, p. 70) It is true to say that not all public relations practitioners belong to a professional body and that some members of these bodies do not adhere to their codes but it has been the case for as long as the PR industry

has existed that most of its practitioners are adherents to the importance of ethical practice.

At the same time, the industry has had to deal with the concept of 'spin'. Spin usually implies a highly selective presentation of the facts in order to turn news coverage into something more favorable for an organization or client that the 'spin doctor' represents. Whilst traditional public relations allows for advocacy and a considerable role for presentation, 'spin' tends to be regarded as deceptive and manipulative selectively providing facts or opinions that support a particular position and hiding those that don't.

From the above literature we can understand that nowadays technological advancement brings information in hand even at individual level. Mainstream mass media consumption is declining. Journalists often use social media to source the news and it is now common to see a Facebook post or tweet quoted in the evening news. Many organizations share information, run promotions and conduct customer service via social media.

The publics are likely having conversations about the organization's brand, products and practices on social media platforms regularly. Social media has the ability to publicly highlight an organization's shortcomings rapidly, and the reputation of organizations. These changes suggest, in the current media climate, public relations practitioners need to be considering social media as part of their communication strategy.

On the other hand, public relations especially in our country didn't go forward as to the technological development. Therefore, assessing the practice and challenges of using Facebook in Public relations in Oromia Regional States is vital and crucial if the regional bureaus have to meet their mission effectively.

2.2. Social Media and Public Relations Practice

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p. 62). Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211) defined social networking sites (SNS) as web-based services that allow

individuals to establish a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to display a list of other users with whom they can connect, and to view and traverse their lists of connections and those made by others within the system.

Public relations can be defined as the “management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985, p. 4). The term relationship in public relations scholarship is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity.” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). There are five major public relations disciplines: financial PR, consumer PR, crisis communication, government PR, and internal PR (International Public Relations [IPR], 2012).

Traditionally, public relations used press releases, brochures, annual reports, books, etc. for getting publicity but now these tools don't provide the same results as social media do. For public relations professionals, however, social media extend beyond traditional media relations and offer the potential to share information, engage publics, and build relationships with the public. The types of social media available to organizations and the public have the potential to both extend and narrow relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2014, p.11).

The new public relations tools have meant that a variety of new strategic communication tactics and channels have emerged giving public relations professionals new ways to reach stakeholders, public, and the media. Additionally, individuals, activists, and non-profit organizations can also use social media to influence organizations and attract media attention. Today, individuals and organizations no longer have to rely solely on traditional media channels and gatekeepers (ibid).

According to Waddel (2010) use of the internet and social media networks is widespread among public relations practitioners and comprise important tools in the PR area. Social media helps public relations because PR practitioners are able to build more new relationships across a wider landscape and in a sustainable way never before possible (as cited in Komodromos, 2014, p. 1). Komodromos added that social media tools provide researchers and PR practitioners with a new and rich source of easily accessible data about individuals, society and potentially the world in general.

More recently, according to (Wang, 2015, p. 3) public relations practitioners have shifted from traditional media to social media as a tool since their inception. There exists various types of social media such as social networking sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), content community (e.g., YouTube and Instagram), and virtual social world (e.g., Second Life), etc. These social media forms have been examined by lots of public relations studies.

In general, social media lets PR bypass the media and go straight to customers. Using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter allows PR to follow and be followed by journalists, drive web traffic, manage issues by responding quickly to criticisms or negative perceptions, and increase exposure for business (Kamal, 2014, p.5).

2.3. E-government and social media

The use of the internet by governments to communicate with citizens is certainly not new; often referred to as “e-government,” these initiatives include all online communications and activities by governments (Dixon, 2010, p. 418). The e-government paradigm is well suited for this era of networking and governance with an emphasis on users as partners in governance (Anttiroiko, 2004, p. 9). A key component of e-government is e-democracy, which can be promoted by engaging social media’s ability to interact directly with citizens.

E-democracy is an emerging concept that denotes the transformation of citizen involvement in democratic and purposeful processes (Stayaert, 2000, p. 6) and can be mediated by social networking media. The classic theories of democracy distinguish among pluralist, representative, and direct theories of democracy. (Norris, 2004, p. 4) outlines the differences in the competing democratic theories and their relation to e-government and e-democracy.

New technologies reduce the cost of sharing and receiving information from constituents. Under the representative theory of democracy, democratic governance occurs through citizen representatives. New technologies can improve representation by allowing citizens the ability to evaluate the records of governments and elected officials and by providing the means for citizens to interact directly with government officials.

Direct theory proposes that democracy works best when people are directly involved in policy debate, actions, and decisions. Citizens who are disengaged can become re-engaged through the use of new technologies; e-democracy can “overcome space and time constraints on public involvement, as well as those associated with status differentials, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and wealth” (Scott, 2006, p. 344).

As opposed to the traditional communications paradigm, the elements of the promotional mix such as public relations, which were largely within the control of organizations, have now become democratized as internet users can now generate and adjust content. User-generated content has been facilitated by Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 12).

Web 2.0 is a term encompassing a second generation of internet-based and interactive applications that are developed around user-generated and user-adjusted content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts and social networking sites. Web 2.0 allows internet users to engage in the creative process by publishing and sharing creative content as well as disseminating information (Thackeray *et al*, 2008, p. 340).

With the broad range of new communication channels, public relations practitioners are faced with a daunting challenge as “internet-based social media tools such as blogs, podcasts, online video and social networks are giving voice to the opinions of millions of consumers” (Carrabis, Cass, Gillin, Nacht&Peverill- Conti, 2008, pg. 11).

From the forgoing views, public relations practitioners, such as organizations, may need to reconsider and augment their traditional approaches. The reason is that, building and maintaining relationships with key publics have paradoxically become both easier and difficult. It has become easier in the sense that more communication options are now available, but the difficulty arises from the fact that publics now have a significant amount of control over content, as opposed to traditional public relations.

2.4. Purposes of social media use

People and organizations use social media for different purposes depending on their respective objectives. Safko and Brake (2009) in Looy (2016) explain that social media can be used for four general reasons: (1) for communicating, (2) for collaborating, (3) for educating, and (4) for entertaining.

- **Social media use for communication**, e.g., to convince and to sell. Organizations should think through what they are communicating and how they measure the effectiveness of their communication and the perceptions by the audience.
- **Social media use for collaboration**, e.g., to convince and to sell. Collaboration has frequently the same purpose of communication. However, it focuses on sharing experience between customers and prospects while using a product.
- **Social media use for education**, e.g., to learn about an organization’s products, brand, suppliers, etc.
- **Social media use for entertainment**, e.g., trying to be funny. Organizations can also use social media in order to be interesting and compelling. They can even try to experiment. Nonetheless, they should wonder whether the majority of the targeted audience will find the message funny, as people may

have different types of humor. They should also be aware of cultural differences between what is considered as being funny.

2.5. Challenges in using social media

In 2012, Indian department of Electronics and Information Technology Ministry of Communication and Information Technology has set the following four challenges of using social media for government organizations.

a) **Why to use social media:** Departments sometimes find it difficult to define the need or objective to use social media. Is it for providing information, seeking feedback, generic interaction, etc? Due to this lack of clarity, departments often either choose not to use social media or attempt to be present on all platforms at once.

b) **Which Platforms to use:** Given the plethora of platforms and even types of social media, it is very difficult to choose the type and no. of platform on which to engage and how to create inter-linkages between these platforms.

c) **Who will engage:** Most departments have limited capacity to engage with traditional media itself and since social media demands a deeper and constant interaction, availability of such resources is even more limited. A closely associated question is that of authority i.e. who is authorized to respond on behalf of the department, whether such a response will be made in personal or official capacity and from personal or official account etc.

d) **How to engage:** Use of social media is an ongoing process and requires long term commitment. Many have questions around rules of engagement – how to create and manage an account, what should be response time, what are the legal implications etc.

2.6. Facebook

Facebook is leading social networks and offers users an opportunity to engage with organizational profile and messages through three different engagement tools such as likes, shares and comments. Organizations naturally seek to attract attention from the public (Linke, Knut, 2011p. 4). The change in the dynamics of marketing interchange between organizations and users as introduced by social media has placed a focus on the non-transactional customer behavior.

The social network Facebook is considered as one of the prime platform for faculties to reach their target groups and engaging with them. Facebook is a leading social network actively used the by people and by organizations in Ethiopia. At the core of all communication on Facebook is a single post (a message). It represents the unit of every Facebook communication. Each post draws a specific amount of attention from a Facebook page (profile) of an organization. Interactions are important to consumers (also page visitors and followers) and companies (organizations). Successful company-consumer interactions foster customer loyalty, willingness to try new offerings, and resistance to negative information about organization.

With almost 2.5 billion monthly active users as of the fourth quarter of 2019, Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. Facebook claims to have a billion monthly active users (as of October 2012), and it has become one of the largest social networks in the world. Facebook offers several layers of public and private information depending on which features members use and on how members configure their privacy settings.

According to John Wiley & Sons (2013, p. 51) Interactions and conversations happen on Facebook in a number of ways:

- **Status update:** Post to the Wall of a Page, the personal Timeline, or a Group using text, photos, videos, or links. (Use dot bullets!)
- **Comment, Likes, and Shares:** React to posts by clicking Like, posting a comment, or sharing the post.
- **E-mail:** Private message one individual or many Facebook friends. Pages and Groups are limited in terms of how they can message individuals to prevent spamming.
- **Check-ins:** Use a Smartphone to check into a Place on Facebook if a Page has been set up with an actual location, or to a Facebook public event within three hours of the event's start time.
- **Facebook chat:** Instant message one individual or groups of people.

2.7 Facebook as a public relations tool

Today, PR practitioners need to challenge standing organizational ecosystems and use Social media to reinvent PR by making relationships matter again. The challenge for PR practitioners is not just trying to find the best way to incorporate social media strategically, but also to determine the best way to measure it and evaluate it effectively. (Komodromos 2014, P.3) Considering that a primary objective of PR is to realize effective two-way communication and mutual understanding between an organization and its intended audience. Organizations are now called on to focus not only on the networks themselves, but also intently on the people in them and their cultures, lifestyles and behaviors (Jones, 2013, P. 9).

Despite the surge in popularity of social media, studies that explore the usage of social media for public relations remain few (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin. 2011, p. 43). Public relations, defined by Grunig and Hunt (as cited in Kamerer & Morris, 2011), is an organization's attempt to manage the communication between itself and its publics. Communication by a single person or organization to thousands of other individuals has been heightened by the advent of internet-based social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 359).

Waters, Burnett, Lamm and Lucas (2009) undertook a content analysis of 275 non-profit organization profiles on Facebook to assess how they used social networking sites to promote their organizational mission and programmers. Among others, they sought to answer the question of how non-profit organizations incorporate relationship development strategies into their Facebook profiles. They found that the non-profits had not integrated most of the numerous interactive Facebook applications on their profile. They failed to capitalize on the interactivity of social networking, and consequently Facebook. They also rarely distributed organizational news.

In addition, Facebook has facilitated the communication in an organization, and serve as a tool for users to complete their work. McCorkindale (2010, p. 2) investigated how corporations have used Facebook for relationship maintenance, engagement and also information dissemination. Facebook provides a rich entertainment-based platform for employees to create and complete assignments. Joyce other organizations, they tend to use Facebook for sharing investor-related material such as press releases, industry-related news articles, media coverage and information on conferences (Wright, & Hinson, 2015, p. 9).

Furthermore, Briones *et al* (2011) conducted a study by interviewing forty individuals from the American Red Cross to explore how social media is used in communication with key publics. The study sought to investigate how two-way dialogue had been accomplished primarily through Facebook and Twitter. The research showed evidence that the study's participants were aware of the importance of social media, and how it could be used to build stronger relationships with publics such as volunteers and the community.

Sung and Kim (2014, p.7) analyzed the impact of organizational approaches such as non-promotional messages and levels of interactivity on perception. They discovered that publics consider corporate activities on Facebook more negatively when they perceive the medium as a personal space. In other words, if a participant believed the organization was impeding on their personal space, the participant's perception of that organization was negative. But, if the organization was highly interactive with its publics on Facebook, public perception was positive.

It seems that most studies recognize the relationship-building capacity of social media. This can also be applied to government organizations, as they also communicate or dialogue with various key publics, using Facebook. In effect, dialogue is seemingly necessary in an organization-public relation. Traditional media employ a one-directional communication from a station to a user; social media empowers people to respond. Organizations can quickly mine valuable feedback based on the reaction of the audience.

2.8. Facebook behavior: like, comment, and share

Social media behaviors fall into three levels: consuming, contributing, and creating (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011, p. 15–17). Consuming is the lowest, involving participative behaviors without contributing to or creating contents such as reading and watching. As the middle level, contributing is the interactions between users and contents as well as among users, which include participating in forums or commenting on posts. Creating is the highest level, which involves producing and publishing content. Each social media behavior needs a different amount of cognitive effort from the other.

People use more cognitive effort when creating (e.g., writing) than when consuming a message (e.g., reading) (Piolat, Olive, & Kellogg, 2005, p. 10). Similarly, as people commit to a higher level of social media behavior (i.e., creating), they exert more cognitive effort into the behavior. Thus, diverse social media behaviors that can be categorized as consuming, contributing, and creating can manifest different levels of psychological effort.

In a similar way, Facebook behaviors also fall into discrete levels. First, like is the lowest. Like requires less commitment than others do. While a click is enough for like, comment and share need additional actions that ask extra commitment or cognitive effort. Second, share may be a higher level than comment. When commenting on a post, the post appears on News Feed, but other posts push it out of News Feed before long.

On the other hand, when sharing a post, the post not only appears on News Feed but also goes to user's profile page, suggesting that the shared post constitutes a part of user's self-presentation. Social media users are strategic in self-presentation (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 206). For example, when presenting the self on Facebook, individuals carefully consider public evaluation of the self and whether online self-presentation is consistent with offline self-presentation (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011, p.816). This suggests that share may be a strategic behavior related to self-presentation and thus needs more cognitive effort than does comment.

In other words when sharing a post, users are more committed to assessing its value regarding the self than when commenting on a post. In addition, technologically, Facebook allows users to add comments on the shared post, which also may mean that share needs more cognitive effort than does comment. Based on the discussion, the present research categorizes share as the highest, comment as the intermediate, and like as the lowest level. Regardless of hierarchical levels of Facebook behaviors, however, the more important meaning of this categorization is that each behavior has a psychological (at least cognitively) implication that is different from the other.

2.9 Theoretical framework

2.9.1. Diffusion of innovation theory

The theory was developed by Everett Rogers in 1962. It was coined from the work of a 19th-century French legal scholar and sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, titled the Laws of Limitation. Diffusion of innovations theory states that an innovation (that is, an idea, new technique, or new technology) diffuses or spreads throughout a society in a predictable pattern. A few people will adopt an innovation as soon as they hear of it. Other people will take longer to try something new, and still others will take much longer.

When a new media technology or another innovation is adopted rapidly by a great number of people, it is said to explode into being (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). The theory discussed above conforms to the study because social media are new tools corporate PR practitioners use in carrying out their duties, yet some are still skeptical about its impact in the field of public relations and are reluctant to adopt them or use them. This explains why some PR practitioners are still holding on to the traditional media for their publicity engagements, without paying attention to the new opportunities presented by the social media.

2.9.2. Theory of social presence

It was incepted by John Short, Bruce Christie and Ederyn Williams. As per the theory, successful communication happens if the means of communication has sufficient social presence. In regards to the social presence continuum, physical communication is considered as having the highest level of social presence whereas written has the least. It is presumed that in the theory, interaction encompassing two individuals, they are both aimed at performing certain roles and preserving some level of personal connection. The two elements of any interaction are regarded as interparty and interpersonal communication (Short, et al., 1976).

Dubois and Gadde in 2012 came up with the social influence model of technology which explained that the social media impacts the exchange of news, interactions and learning. It can also influence a person's behavior. Based on the social presence theory, attitudes and impacts of the media are expected to differ and be partially and socially constructed. The social psychological procedures that are utilized to describe the creation of meaning and use trends with regard to communication technology encompass social learning as per Gillin (2009) and the processing of social information as further highlighted by Eisenhardt and Kathleen (2009). In addition, the theory maintains that behavior patterns are supposed to grow based on observing others, effects of behavior and emotional reactions according to Eisenhardt and Kathleen (2009). This type of social influence on one's behavior can originate from a communication showing others' opinions, behaviors and practices.

This theory relates to this study in that, social influences through social media has had an effect on how PR practice is done in government. Approaches or models that scholars believed to be very practical in government public relations are refuted. For instance, Public information model has to be abandoned in the era of social media, because of interactivity, two-way communication, dialogic, among other features of digitalization.

2.9.3. The Media Richness Theory

The media richness theory in the opinion of Martin (2009) is based on the assumption that the purpose of any communication is to resolve ambiguity and reduce uncertainty. It states that different types of social media differ in the degree of richness they possess

and based on capacity to convey multiple verbal and nonverbal signals, ability to allow immediate feedback, usage of natural language, and presence of personal focus. Accordingly, some social media are more effective than other in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty. Messages that are less equivocal do not require rich media. Instead, lean media should be used to adequately carry these messages.

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

Summary

In this chapter a brief literature review was presented. At the beginning some recent overview of social media were presented. The overview of available academic papers showed the important role of social media on in public relations practice. More specific studies were discussed and they showed that the social networks definitely have changed the relationship between the organizations and their publics. Additionally, purposes of social media, challenges they have were also presented. Moreover issues related to Facebook and public relations are also discussed. Finally theoretical framework is set.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design and approach

In order to explore and understand the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in bureaus of Oromia Region, this study employed a qualitative research approach. Qualitative methodology is used because of its elasticity to accommodate the purpose of the research. Usually, qualitative research utilizes smaller sets of data that are adequate to accomplishing dependable results, through consistent data analysis until saturation (Cresswell 2014, p. 296). The method involves collecting data from those who are immersed in everyday life of a situation under investigation.

Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior (Kothari, 2014, p. 22). Moreover, this research is designed as a cross-sectional research design. Cross-sectional research designs are also known as survey designs. They entail data collection from numerous cases “at a single point in time” (Wilson 2014, p.112). This enables the completion of research over a comparatively short period. Thus, this approach preferably goes with this study, i.e. the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in some selected bureaus of Oromia Region.

3.2. Data sources

In the study both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data sources were gathered from PR professionals and communicators in the selected bureaus of Oromia region.

The assumption of qualitative method is that people who are part of a situation understand it much better than others who are external to it (Ritchie,J. 2003, p. 11). Accordingly, it is believed that Public relations practitioners in the bureaus have better understanding about practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in the

regional bureaus than others. Whereas, the secondary data sources like latest books, journals and government documents were used. Additional contents of Facebook pages of the bureaus were used as a source of data.

3.3. Target population and sampling techniques

3.3.1 Target Population

The target population for the study comprises the PR practitioners and communication officers in Oromia Regional State:

- i. Government Communication Affairs Bureau,
- ii. Health Bureau,
- iii. Education Bureau,

These bureaus were selected because they are among the largest bureaus and have structures at the local level. All the bureaus have Facebook accounts which they use to disseminate information to their stakeholders and publics. The purpose for this specific selection of PR practitioners and communication officers was based on the logic that these individuals have experience and knowledge concerning use of social media.

3.3.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in the study. Purposive sampling has the benefit of ensuring the selection of information-rich participants (Patton 200, P. 6) that are relevant in addressing the research objectives (Bryman 2012, p. 13) and therefore most likely to ensure insightful contributions to research findings. Thus PR practitioners and communicators were selected purposively from the target bureaus of the region stated. Additionally, contents of Facebook posts between March 15, 2020 to 14, April, 2020 of the three bureaus' were chosen for the analysis.

3.4. Data collection methods

In order to get detail data about the practice and challenges of using Facebook in the practice public relations in bureaus of Oromia region, the researcher used in-depth interview and content analysis of the Facebook pages of the bureaus. Data gathering of

the interview took place on 8-10 of May 2020 while the data of content analysis was gathered on 1st of May 2020.

i. In-depth Interview

An in-depth interview is important in qualitative research method in which the researcher collects data directly from the participants. The most important advantages of using interview are the wealth of detail and accurate responses that it provides regardless of the difficulty in generalizing the data (Wimmer, & Dominick, 2011, p. 6). A semi-structured interview was conducted to obtain wealth of detail data with public relations practitioners in the bureaus with an intention to get detail information about the existing practice and challenges of using Facebook for public relations.

Semi-structured interviews are the convergence between structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012, p. 13). This is because semi-structured interview types allow the interviewer to follow the interview guide when posing questions/prompts although the interviewer may also ask questions that are not necessarily outlined in the interview guide such as seeking clarifications and probing the interviewee for more information without being coercive (Bryman 2012, p. 471).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data because they allowed for the flexibility of the researcher to follow an interview guide in a non-rigid manner and the ability to ask questions that were not necessarily in the interview guide yet were necessary depending on the response given by the interviewee. This allowed for the generation of deeper and richer insights from the interviewees that would have been left out had the researcher employed structured interviews. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to interject politely and steer the interview sessions towards addressing the research objectives when he felt that interviewees were digressing from them. This may not have been possible had the researcher opted for unstructured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five PR practitioners and communicators with an average duration of 42 minutes. Four of the interviews were conducted over the phone, and one interview was an in person interview at Oromia Health Bureau. All of the conversations were recorded using the application Call Recorder with the participant's permission. All of the informants participated on the interview are males. Nine structured questions were discussed in the interview in which the interviewees were to provide practice and challenges of using Facebook in PR.

ii. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a formal system for doing something we all do informally rather frequently draw conclusions from observations of content (Stempel 2003, p. 209). Content analysis has been demonstrated to be the predominant method in internet related public relations research. As social media are open to the public, content analysis could generate a broad picture of social media use in public relations practice (Ye & Ki, 2012 p. 425). Analyzing Facebook posts is important for some reasons. Facebook provides a forum that is favorable to back and forth interaction among users and the organizations. The Organizations can post a message that can then be responded to by its Facebook followers. If a user isn't online at the time the initial message was posted, that user can later read the discussion and partake in the message delivered.

Since the objective of this study is to identify practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in the selected bureaus of Oromia, content analysis data collections techniques were employed to answer the research questions. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to analyze some selected Facebook posts of the organizations. Neuendorf (2002, p. 10) defines content analysis as a summarizing, qualitative content analysis is used to aid the identification of themes and patterns in the organizations' Facebook Posts. Qualitative content analysis is more interpretive in paying close attention to comparatively small chunks of texts (Krippendorff, 2004, p.17).

Some purposively selected one month March 15, 2020 to April 14, 2020 Facebook posts of the organizations were collected manually and analyzed with Facebook behaviors; like, comment and share using inductive content analysis. Most importantly, the reactions of Facebook users in reference to questions about practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations were seen.

3.5. Methods of data processing and analysis

The collected data that were provided by five informants through qualitative interview needs to be analyzed and interpreted to give it meaning. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to allow an accurate analysis of the informants' comments and discussion. Data gathered through in-depth interview and qualitative content analysis data collection techniques were transcribed and coded. After the first stage of coding similar or related topics were merged and grouped to form a bigger category on one hand and topics irrelevant to the study were eliminated on the second stage.

The transcripts of interviews were read several times, according to what the informants said about their knowledge and experiences concerning practice and challenges of using Facebook in PR in bureaus of Oromia Region. This includes transcribing the verbal interview into text, synthesizing, categorizing and summarizing the coded data, verifying the data is reliable and valid and finally, reporting the results.

The important points that related to answering the research questions were grouped together and those that carried similar information were grouped differently. The information that was obtained from the interview was then used to formulate the themes that were used in the data analysis chapter. In general, a process of thematic analysis was used, in which key themes and sub-themes relevant to the research questions of the study were derived inductively from the interview data. Thematic analysis offers an effective method for analyzing qualitative data (Stirling, A. 2001, p.12). These were used to structure the presentation of results from the interviews used to preserve the real-life experiences of the research participants.

3.6. Ethical considerations

All ethical principles including anonymity, confidentiality and participants consent have been considered before starting the research. All selected informants for the interviews must have been assured that their confidentiality has to be given top priority. They were all informed that their confidentiality could be maintained by keeping their names and quotes anonymous and storing all data they provided in a secure and confidential environment during the study and destroyed later.

This theory relates to this study in that, social influences through social media has had an effect on how PR practice is done in government. Approaches or models that scholars believed to be very practical in government public relations are refuted. For instance, public information model has to be abandoned in the era of social media, because of interactivity, two-way communication, dialogic, among other features of digitalization.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview

This chapter sets out the findings of a qualitative study of the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in bureaus of Oromia Region. The data collection methods consisted of a face to face and phone call interviews. Additionally a review of Facebook pages of Oromia Communication, Health and Education Bureaus were made. Purposive sampling was used to generate a sample of public relation practitioners from these bureaus. This chapter sets out the findings of the research by key themes relevant to the purpose of the study and the research questions.

The official Facebook page of the Oromia Communication Bureau is, named as “Oromia Communication Bureau” was created on 1st of August, 2012 and as of Apr 20, 2020 the page has 193,496 page likes and 205,699 peoples are following it. Oroma Regional Health Bureau named as “Oromia Regional Health Bureau” was created on December 17, 2014 and as of April 20, 2020 the page has 47,391 page likes while 49,489 peoples are following it. Oromia Education Bureau named as “Biiroo Barnoota Oromiyaa” was created on 10 October, 2011 and as of April 20, 2020 the page has 4,753 Facebook friends.

Five senior PR practitioners were interviewed to explore their practices and their perceptions on the use Facebook in PR in bureaus of Oromia region. All samples included in the study are males (age range: 30–42). All informants indicated they have been practicing PR for an average of 7– 13 years. Three of them hold Master degree in Journalism and Communication and two of them BA in Journalism and Communication and Language and literature.

4.2 Data presentation and analysis

Based on the main and specific objectives of the study, in depth interview and qualitative content analysis data collections techniques are employed to answer the research questions. Accordingly in order to have a better understanding of the subject matter the data gathered through the two techniques are presented.

RQ: 1 why are the regional bureaus using Facebook in PR?

All the five informants were asked why and to what extent they are using Facebook in practice of public relations. The informants provided that many of the organizations are using official Facebook pages because they saw Facebook as a good medium to communicate with their publics. They use it to disseminate current information to their public. They indicated that they used their organizations' Facebook pages as a communication tool and a medium to increase their stakeholders' awareness on new and existing services provided by the bureaus as well as their achievements.



Figure 1 Facebook Page OCB



Figure 2 Face page of ORHB

Most of the public relations practitioners urged on the use of Facebook in organizational public relations practice, the bureaus to take full advantage of the social media tools. According to them, the highly interactive nature of Facebook, its cost effectiveness and speed of information dissemination makes it essential in current public relations practice. But they confirmed that they were not using interactively with their publics.

When the researcher inquired, which PRs activities carried out using Facebook the informants stated that they use it for disseminating organizational news, promoting organizational services, using it for country image building, for creating awareness regarding national policies and strategies with respect to their bureaus mission and vision. Therefore, PR practitioners in the bureaus of Oromia region used Facebook to deliver information regarding their bureaus news, promoting organizational services, awareness creating on national policies and strategies, and country image building.

Additionally contents analyzed from the Facebook pages of the bureaus also show that it is used to disseminating news, their organization plan, performance, events, and different new or current activities of their organization, their region and the country as well.

The informants also stated that they are using Facebook as public relations tool during working hours and sometimes when their bureaus have activities out of working hours especially during the week ends they use it and post information on their page. There is expertise assigned to manage and disseminate information Facebook pages

Social media team leader of Oromia communication bureau noted that:

“We posted information on Facebook that include regional government press releases, governments’ stand, annual reports, mission and vision of the bureau and messages to the public. Here people on this platform and media get it easily and use it as a source of news. We can reach our followers quickly and easily. The other media are late when compared to Facebook.”

This finding seems to affirm (Wang, 2015) that public relations practitioners have shifted from traditional media to social media as a tool since their inception. They are using Facebook to post press releases, annual reports, speeches, corporate social responsibility programs, and data in relation to their services

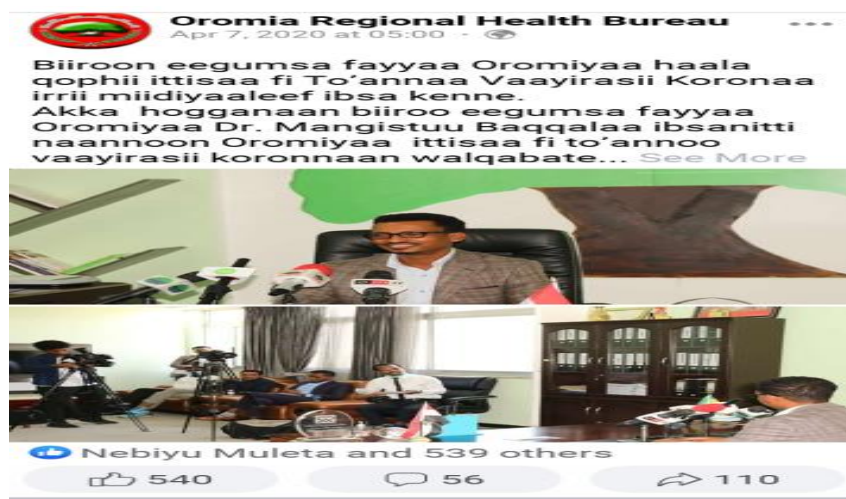


Figure 3 OHB head giving press conference

The informants discussed how Facebook is inexpensive tool for public relations. They commented that, “It [Facebook] is a low cost way to reach out to those who have an interest access”. Specifically, informants discussed how it was especially important for government organizations, which have limited resources, to utilize inexpensive yet effective tools. One informant indicated this by stating, “When it’s not costly, the bureaus have to pay attention. Money, its limited, and you have to be good stewards of your resources, you can easily promote your bureaus mission, vision and services with low cost. ”

When the informants asked on their views on the use of Facebook in bureau public relations practice, most of the public relations practitioners urged the bureaus to take full advantage of the social media tools. According to them, the highly interactive nature of Facebook, its cost effectiveness and speed of information dissemination makes it indispensable in current public relations practice. You can easily access your publics in the region, in the country and all over the world at the same time without any restrictions.

The results of content analysis made by the researcher also revealed that the three regional bureaus used Facebook to upload government stands, press release, trainings; current messages related to their bureaus, news, social, economic and political agenda. Therefore, political statements of the government are the major contents uploaded on the Oromia Communication Bureau Facebook page while health and education posted messages related to their mission that is about health and education respectively. These agree with the idea of (Wright & Hinson, 2012) that organizations tend to use Facebook for sharing investor-related material such as press releases, industry-related news articles, media coverage and information on conferences.

RQ2: What are the practices of using Facebook in the organizations?

The informants were also asked about their practices and opportunities of using Facebook in public relations. The informants informed that they are using Facebook in Public relations frequently. Whenever there are news about their organization, plans, reports, job vacancies, and updates their bureaus are posted daily. As observed from their Facebook page between the dates taken to analyze the contents the Facebook page shows that all the three bureaus at least post one content daily and more. The data analyzed from the content of Facebook page shows that, between, March 15 to April 14 with in a month there are 79 Posts on Oromia Communication Bureau, 35 posts in Oromia regional Health Bureau and 27 Posts in Oromia Education Bureau. This data indicates that the bureaus use Facebook frequently for the practice of PR.

We disseminate information given from the government to the public, different activities of regional sectors, reports of best practices in education, health, agriculture, water and the like sectors information. Based on this, our followers can comment, share, like the information disseminated. Through this it can easily access everywhere. Especially information about politics, social and economy which we thought good to the people are disseminated. Additionally information that can be used as input for government is also posted on our Facebook page.'

There are different directorates in the bureaus. Most of them are willing to disseminate activities under their directorate. So we can have plenty of information to disseminate regarding health issues. We can get feedback easily from our followers.

RQ: 3 what are the challenges of using Facebook in the organizations?

Most informants recognized the challenges of using Facebook for PR activities in the following manner. All of them mentioned that slow or weak internet connection was the major challenge of using Facebook to carry out PR activities. To disseminate the information easily and to reach so many people timely, social media is the preferred media. Thus, internet connection should be available every time.

One informant described that the challenges they are facing in using Facebook in public relation practice as follows. He said that there are experts and leaders who disseminate information of the bureau without the consent of our communication team. It may be training given; may be health education and other activities are seen disseminated by individual Facebook pages. With one organization source of information should be one responsible body. Some directorates are not willing to give information. There is a gap of collaboration. The other challenge is lack of skill how to use Facebook for PR is observed. Some days when there is lack of connection and it is week it challenges us to disseminate information.

The other point raised as a challenge of using Facebook in public relations practice is that you can't use as the only tool to reach every public. This hinders your message not to reach every target publics. Especially in our country the internet access limited to urban areas majority of the people are living in rural areas. Thus it is challenging to reach these publics via Facebook. Additionally majority of our society do not have access to it may be due to poverty, may not know how to operate it. In this case you are obliged to use other means.

The other issues identified as a challenge of using Facebook in public relations practice is there are fake accounts with the name of the bureaus. There are at least three fake with names of these bureaus. The bureaus manage this challenge by informing their publics as there are fake accounts with their name on their real account. Additionally most of the time this fake accounts are not active as one of the informants mentioned. Among the three bureaus Oromia Communication Bureau has a verified Facebook account (blue flag). Facebook has created page verification procedures that offer further accountability regarding the publishers of Facebook pages. Due to this they do not bother about the fake accounts. All the three bureaus are aware of as there fake account with their official name and different information which they haven't produced is disseminated on it. In order not to mislead their publics they regularly inform fake news disseminated on this fake account.

Almost all the informants as informed that the nature of the Facebook by itself is challenging them. It is open to everybody. There are Facebook users who discuss on this platform without the intended message they disseminated. Mostly political issues are presented under the status of comment. Issues which do not go with the mission and vision of the bureaus were discussed and presented. To manage such issues mostly they analyze such issues and give briefings to their publics on this platform.

According to the informants' explanation, lack of credibility is one of the fundamental factors that remain as a challenge in the era of information society. The audience needs variety of information. The main obstacle of Facebook is it is suffering from fake news because as they said that this century is a period when everyone can generate content. Everybody can have an access; can load any rumors as well as any factual information. Due to this there is a chance where one can easily be spreader, as well as there is some information like hatred information, rumors etc. are uploaded. So, the audience is dissatisfied and anger on the rumors as well as other fake news which are uploaded on different Facebook accounts. In their case, they are not doing that. They are trying to upload and post credible information, because their intention is not to misinform their audience. They believed they have to give the right information at the right time and at the right place.

The informants have raised, challenges related to government officials who post official activities on their personal Facebook page. Almost all the informants agreed with this challenge. One of the informants briefed the challenge as follows. "I think it shouldn't be like that. If one is a leader of one organization he is not permanent on that position. As we are observing leaders change their position with in short period of time. So they need to focus to promote their organizations services rather than promoting themselves. There are cases in which we take the information from the leader's personal account and disseminate on our Facebook page. I think this is not the right way. Nowadays the public is following the officials personal Facebook account rather than that the organization Facebook page. This may be to get more followers and to promote themselves. These officials have to give the firsthand information to PR or communicators of that

organization and the information should be disseminated from the official page of that organization. Surprisingly there are cases in which the PR practitioner's or communicators produce contents of new or government stands and posted on officials Facebook page. These related issues are currently challenging us.”

The informants were asked about if there are guidelines or strategies which help them to use Facebook in the practice of public relations. They respond that as there were no guidelines or strategies that guides them to use Facebook as PR tool.

Facebook should be managed with strategy and guidelines. Therefore the government should give attention to this. In order to upgrade the profession of PR in our country, that is on an infant stage Facebook need to have guideline which serves the practitioners to use the tool appropriately. This will serve both the practitioners and the government to disseminate information to the public. Currently, we are operating Facebook without guidelines and the practitioners post whatever they thought it is useful to post it.

The social media activities of the bureaus are carried out by the social media team in Oromia Communication Bureau and by communication experts in Oromia Health Bureau and Education Bureau. They are responsible to carry out the tasks on the social media special the Facebook. In Oromia Communication Bureau there are five expertise responsible for this activities and only one expert from health and education bureaus by the time this study is conducted.

Basically, there is no guideline and strategy which clearly state for what purpose the bureaus use the Facebook. But the bureaus uses the Facebook to disseminate information regarding the activities carried out in the region as whole for communication bureau and health and education related issues for health and education bureaus. They were asked why not to adapt the guideline and they respond mostly we discuss when the annual plan of the bureaus presented to the internal workers. The Oromia communication bureau is planning to draft the guide line

RQ. 4 How has the usage of Facebook changed the way regional bureaus PR practitioners and communicators engage their publics and stakeholders?

The five informants were also asked how the usage of Facebook changed the way the regional bureaus PR practitioner's and communicators engage their public and stakeholders.

The informants mentioned that the use of Facebook has changed public service delivery, either by reducing the amount of in-person contact needed, to inform the activities of the bureaus immediately, or enabling the organization to respond more quickly to suggestions of the public. All the informants stressed that Facebook allowed their bureau to be responsive as soon as possible to stakeholders' related issues. Formerly there were a suggestion box in which they gather public's comments and suggestions. But now this is changed. Every comment, suggestions and correction related these bureaus are given openly on Facebook. Additionally they believe that Facebook reduces in person and phone contact because people have such confidence in what we are putting out on social media.

One of the informants stated that "The usage of Facebook has many benefits. It facilitated the passage of the information and secured its rapid publishing. I would like to remind you that in the past we used old media to disseminate information to our publics. We used newspapers, lobby journalists from broadcast media. But now as soon as we created content we directly post it on our Facebook page and reach to our publics. When we have some kind of advertisement we need to pay for the broadcast and print media. However, with the introduction of Facebook we have saved much money and began to advertise without specifying slots time as it was before and that we feel assured that our advertisement reaches the majority of people. Surprisingly, the engagement of our publics during this case increases. We get more likes and shares."

The informants in general indicated that Facebook has affected their practices, especially with regard to the dissemination of information to internal and external publics. The informants were positive that the Facebook hold great potential in improving the practices of public relations in their Bureaus. Majority of the informants said that, the Facebook has made public relations notice boards, no to be busy as it was.

Two informants said they use Facebook to share their press releases with the media. The other informant “What we do is to simply share our press release, recent activities of our bureaus, and the accompanying photographs in our official promote them with Facebook instead of placing photographs on notice boards.

The other informant said that although the Facebook sometimes are used to instigate crisis in the region they provide faster channels of responding to crisis. Since the nature of Facebook is open to everybody anyone can generate misleading news which may damage the image of the region as well as the country. In this case we inform our publics what is real.

4.3. Content analysis

In this part contents Facebook of the three bureaus were analyzed. Analysis included major contents, reactions by the public and feedbacks of the bureaus.

i. Oromia Communication Bureau

Oromia Communication Bureau Facebook page was created on Aug, 1, 2012. It is named as “Oromia Communication Bureau” and as of Apr 20, 2020 the page has 193,496 page likes and 205,699 peoples following it. The bureau provided some information on its Facebook homepages. For instance, it provided background information, vision, mission and description. Other basic contact information such as telephone, email and website are provided.



Figure 4 OCB Facebook back ground

Mostly contents posted by the bureau are activities of the region's president, press release of regional government and in general social, economic and political issues of the region as well as the country. The bureau uses Facebook frequently. They post at least two issues par day on their Facebook account. The content of news and related articles sided to politics events.

The Facebook posts mainly featured one-way communication with the bureau being the initiators. In most cases, the bureau was sending out information that entailed about the government stands. The bureau posted government stand on April 14, 2020 about land grabbing in the region. On this post 831 likes, 176 comments and 409 shares were made by the Facebook followers. Unlike the traditional corporate-controlled media, user-centered social media platforms allow individual users to become media gatekeepers and content-creators who collaboratively and proactively engage with companies through likes, posts, and shares within their personal social networks (Muntinga et al., 2011). Facebook has thus changed how organization-related content is created, distributed, and used, transferring the power to define corporate images from corporate communicators to stakeholders' online networks (Muntinga et al., 2011).

An example of a Facebook post illustrating regional government



Figure 5 OCB Press release

Among 176 comments most of them need a response from the bureau. The public asked about as if there were a rule and regulation on how to administer the land, who is grabbing? What is the role of the government? And so on. But no one has respond on these issues from the Facebook administrators. This also confirms that the data got from the interview with PR practitioner in the bureau as they do not respond on the comments the public.

In other case on this post there were comments given by the publics which are an ethical and do not go with the content. Other political issues are set as a comment from the publics. This is may be due to the open nature of platform. Whatever it is those who manage this Facebook need to react with the comments of the publics in order to reduce the challenges come to them through comments.

Unlike the traditional corporate-controlled media, user-centered social media platforms allow individual users to become media gatekeepers and content-creators who collaboratively and proactively engage with companies through likes, posts, and shares within their personal social networks (Muntinga et al., 2011). Social media has thus changed how organization-related content is created, distributed, and used, transferring the power to define corporate images from corporate communicators to stakeholders' online networks (Muntinga et al., 2011).

ii. Oromia Health Bureau

Oromia Health Bureau Facebook page was created on Dec. 17, 2014. It is named as “Oromia Regional Health Bureau” and as of Apr 20, 2020 the page has 47,391 page likes and 49,487 peoples following it. The bureau provided some information on its Facebook homepages. For instance, it provided background information, contact address. The mission and Vision of the bureau were not set.

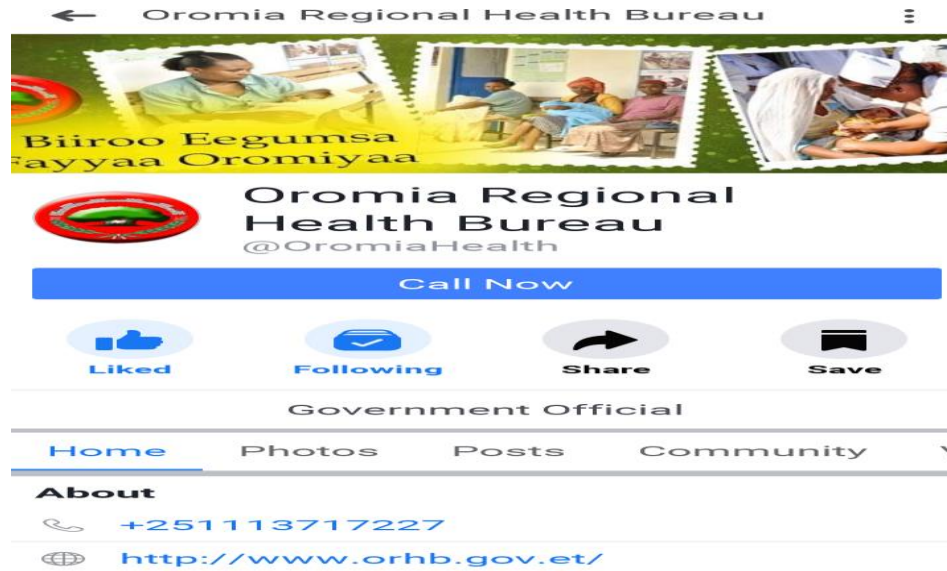


Figure 6 ORHB Facebook background

Almost all the contents of Facebook posts of Oromia Health bureau is related to health issues. Different healthy related articles were posted at on the Facebook pages. Majority of the information depending on Health related news. Most posts related to activities undertaken by the bureau. Under each post there are feedbacks given by the publics. Note taking seriously the feedbacks provided through comments. This offends target audience.

iii. Oromia Education Bureau

Oromia Education Bureau named as “Biiroo Barnoota Oromiyaa” was created on 10 October, 2011 and as of April 20, 2020 the page has 4,753 Facebook friends. On this bureau Facebook mission, vision and contact address are not set.



Biiroo Barnootaa Oromiyaa

We shall make Oromia flood of genius students who score high grades in national exams.



Friends



Following



Message



More

Figure 7 OEB Facebook background

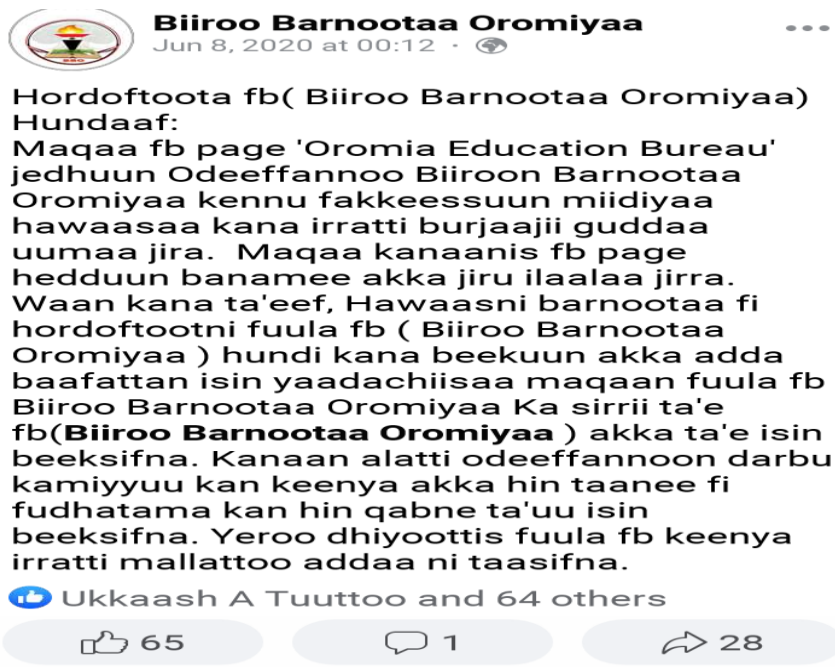


Figure 8 OEB informing fake accounts

The above figure shows Oromia Education Bureau is informing its followers as there is a Facebook account with the name 'Oromia Education Bureau' which they don't

manage it. The bureau telling its followers as information disseminated on this account is not their stand.

4.4. Discussion of the Findings

The number of years the three regional bureaus has been on Facebook ranges from 6 to 9 and each of them had 4,752 to 205,699 Facebook friends and followers. The study findings show that the Facebook has redefined the practices of public relations in the bureaus. Print media and notice boards were one of the traditional channels of disseminating information to the internal and external publics of the bureaus have been replaced with Facebook which is the preferred channels for most publics and stakeholders. The bureaus public relations practitioners no longer wait for the traditional media to publish their news, government stands, press releases; they provide updates on activities using Facebook.

The study revealed that there is a frequent use of Facebook, on daily basis, in PR practice of the three bureaus. Facebook is used as a daily communication tool in PR practice. Hence, challenging the traditional role of the PR officer and adding more workload, because Facebook requires regularity in online communication, to keep handling the frequent complaints and critical comments rose on the bureaus. The activities being done daily include timely response to inquiries and update of statuses. This implies that Facebook has become a daily and part of the role by public relations practitioners in government.

The study also revealed that there are challenges related to internet connection which was only limited to urban areas, even here in urban areas poor and high cost limits the usage of Facebook as public relations tool. The majority of the people who live in rural areas and who do not have access to the usage of smart phones and computers can't be reached using Facebook platform.

Since the nature of Facebook is open to everybody who have access to internet it creates platform to react on the contents of the Facebook posted by the bureaus. This helped the

bureaus to get immediate feedback from their followers immediately. As there are constructive reactions given by the Facebook followers, there are also Facebook users who use this platform unethically. They write hate speeches and negative comments under the posts made by the bureaus. Some people give irrelevant comments, sometimes even insults, underneath posts of the bureau. In such cases the bureaus tries to address the individuals in text messages and if the comment persists it goes further to block the user from accessing the page for good. The vulnerable nature of the social media has brought negative impact on the public relation practitioner's daily practice of Facebook for the practice of PR.

4.5 Summary

The purpose of this study is to identify the practice and challenges of using Facebook in public relations in bureaus of Oromia Region. Qualitative methodology is used in the study. The data used in the research were collected using semi structured in-depth interview and Facebook content analysis. Purposive sampling is used to select three bureaus from bureaus of Oromia Region. Five public relations practitioners have participated in the in-depth interview. One face to face and four phone call interviews were conducted. The findings indicate that all the selected bureaus use Facebook often as PR tool; however there is more one way communication resulting in less interaction to increase the relationship and foster closer relationship between the organization and its public. Poor internet connection, fake Facebook accounts, dissemination of bureaus information on personal Facebook pages of the officials are among the challenges PR practitioners facing. Despite of these challenges the usage of Facebook in public relations practice has facilitated to achieve their objectives. Immediate press release, news, vacancies, achievements are disseminated to the public immediately.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that Oromia Regional State Communication Bureau, Health and Education bureaus PR practitioners are using Facebook in their PR practices. Based on the information obtained through semi-structured in-depth interview and content analysis; the researcher analyzed the data by using qualitative data analyzing method. The researchers found practice and challenges of using Facebook in PR practice. Based on the finding of the study, the following conclusions were set.

Overall, the three bureaus sampled for this study seemed to recognize the potential of Facebook as an street for managing relationships with key publics, as proved by their Facebook presence and activities such as information updates, government stands, press releases, their organization plan, performance, events, and different new or current activities. They also used Facebook to deliver information like bureaus services, awareness creating on national policies and strategies in respect to the bureaus mission and vision, and building images of the region as well as the country as a whole.

While the public relations in these bureaus may be conscious of the interactive opportunities Facebook can afford, they seem to underutilize the platform to its full capacity. It is seen as a very interactive platform where immediate feedbacks were got from the bureaus publics. These feedbacks, according to the informants were incorporated into the bureaus' present and future plans. It appears that the three regional bureaus under study were not taking full advantage of the two-way relationship building potential of Facebook. Finally public relations practitioners recognized Facebook as an effective communication tool.

The major challenges of using Facebook in public relations in bureaus of Oromia region are: internet connection problem, lack less attention given by top management, fake organizational pages, lack of policy and guide lines how to use Facebook in PR, dissemination of government information on personal pages of government officials and unethical reactions of some Facebook followers of the bureaus.

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Appendix

In-depth Interview Guide

Practice and Challenges of Using Facebook in Public Relations

Interview Guide

Thank you very much for accepting the call to participate in this interview. Please answer all the questions honestly and thoroughly. All the information given will be used for academic research purpose only and will be always kept confidential.

- What is your role in the organization?
- If at all, please explain how your role is involved with public relations?
- For how long have you been in this position in this organization?
- What is your educational background?

Practice and Challenges of Using Facebook in Public Relations

1. Do you (Public Relations Practitioners) use Facebook for your professional practices?
2. Would You explain your practice on the use of Facebook to disseminate information to your publics or stakeholders?
3. Kindly state the types of information that are disseminated by your organization to its publics over Facebook platforms?
4. What are the opportunities for using Facebook as a public relations tool at your bureau?
5. What are the challenges of using the Facebook as a government communication tool at your bureau? How do you overcome it?
6. Is there any relationship between use of Facebook in PR and effectiveness on your job? Describe it?
7. Do you get inquiries or feedback through social media from your publics? If yes how often do you respond? If not what is the reason?
8. Please give your opinion on the potential benefits that Facebook can have on PR practice.

9. Is there any issues reacted on your Facebook page by your publics out of your content and mission of your organization? If yes what kind of issues are reacted most by your followers? How do you manage it?

Thank you very much for your honest insights and responses during the interview. Your responses are invaluable and crucial to the findings and conclusions of this study.