



**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & COMMUNICATION**

**MA PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC RELATIONS & STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION**

**The Use of Social Media as a Public Relations Tool Among  
Humanitarian Organizations in Ethiopia:  
The Case of Ethiopian Red Cross Society**

**By Henok Birhanu**

**July 2021**

**The Use of Social Media as a Public Relations Tool Among  
Humanitarian Organizations in Ethiopia:  
The Case of Ethiopian Red Cross Society**

**By Henok Birhanu**

**Advisor: Samuel Mochona (PhD)**

**A Thesis Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Public  
Relations and Strategic Communication**

**July 2021**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION  
Department of Public Relations and Strategic Communication

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Henok Birhanu entitled — The Use of Social Media as A Public Relations Tool Among Humanitarian Organizations in Ethiopia: The Case of Ethiopian Red Cross Society is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts Degree in Public Relations and Strategic Communication, complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Approved by the Board of Examiners:

_____ Advisor	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Examiner	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Examiner	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Chair of Department or Graduate Programs Coordinator	_____ Signature	_____ Date

## **Abstract**

*This research is conducted to investigate the use of social media as a PR tool among humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia by taking the specific case of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS). The study also specifically assesses whether the ERCS is adopting social media as a PR tool or not, the drives for adopting social media and the opportunities and challenges of using it in the ERCS. To provide answers to the research questions, the study employed a qualitative research approach. Primary data were collected through an in-depth interview conducted with colleagues of the communication department. Selected thematic messages were also gathered from the social media platforms of the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube outlets for qualitative content analysis. This study employed affordance theory to better understand the use of social media in an organizational setting like the ERCS. The results indicate that the ERCS's communication department has adopted social media as a PR tool. The main drives for using social media are management directions, its recognition in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and to take advantage of some of its benefits. The ERCS use social media to convey general and thematic messages. These messages are mainly prepared in Amharic and English languages by predominantly using the combination of text and picture/photograph contents. By using social media as a PR tool, the ERCS is able to widely communicate its messages and further reach its publics. The ERCS is unable to optimally use social media as a PR tool due to technical, administrative and input related challenges. To further improve the ERCS's social media engagement, this study forwarded some strategic and technical recommendations.*

## Table of contents

### Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Table of contents .....	iv
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Abbreviations and Acronym .....	viii
Declaration .....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
<b>Chapter One.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background of the Study .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem .....	3
1.3 General and Specific Objectives.....	6
1.3.1 General Objective .....	6
1.3.2 Specific Objectives .....	6
1.4 Research Questions.....	7
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.6 Scope of the Study .....	7
1.7 Limitation of the Study .....	8
1.8 Organization of the Study .....	8
<b>Chapter Two .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2. Review of Related Literature .....	9
2.1. The Concept of Social Media .....	9
2.1.1. What is Social Media? .....	9
2.1.2. Features of Social Media.....	11
2.1.3. Types of Social Media .....	12
2.1.4. Major Functions and Drawbacks of Social Media.....	15
2.2. Social Media as a Public Relations Tool .....	17
2.2.1. What is Public Relations? .....	17
2.2.2. Social Media as a Public Relations Tool .....	20

2.3. Internet and Social Media Use in Ethiopia.....	21
2.3.1. Internet Use in Ethiopia .....	21
2.3.2. Social Media Use in Ethiopia .....	22
2.4. The Concept of Humanitarian or Non-Governmental Organization .....	23
2.5. Origin and Components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement .....	25
2.6. Origin and Functions of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society .....	27
2.7. Theoretical Framework.....	28
2.7.1. Affordance Theory .....	30
2.7.2. Social Media Affordances.....	32
<b>Chapter Three .....</b>	<b>36</b>
3. Research Methodology.....	36
3.1. Introduction .....	36
3.2. Research Design .....	36
3.3. Qualitative Research.....	37
3.4. Sources of Data.....	37
3.5. Data Collection .....	38
3.5.1. Sampling .....	38
3.5.2. Data Collection Tools .....	39
3.5.2.1. In-depth Interview .....	39
3.5.2.2. Qualitative Content Analysis .....	40
<b>Chapter Four .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4. Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion .....	42
4.1. Introduction .....	42
4.1.1 Characteristics of Respondents .....	42
4.1.2. Social Media Contents and Social Media Channels .....	43
4.2. Data Presentation and Analysis .....	43
4.2.1. Adoption of Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS .....	43
4.2.2. The Driving Factors to Adopt Social Media as a PR Tool by the ERCS .....	47
4.2.3. Messages Conveyed through the ERCS’s Social Media Outlets.....	49
4.2.3.1. Availability of Basic Information on the Social Media Profiles of the ERCS.....	55
4.2.4. Opportunities and Challenges of Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS .....	57

4.2.4.1. Opportunities for Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS .....	57
4.2.4.2. The Challenges of Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS .....	59
<b>Chapter Five .....</b>	<b>61</b>
5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.....	61
5.1. Summary of Findings .....	61
5.2. Conclusion .....	68
5.3. Recommendations .....	69
References .....	70
APPENDICES.....	78
Appendix 1 .....	78
Appendix 2 .....	79

List of Tables

<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 1 - Availability of basic information on the social media profiles of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube-----	56



## List of Abbreviations and Acronym

ERCS	Ethiopian Red Cross Society
ETC	Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRCS	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PR	Public Relations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and all the sources materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged. I have carried out the study independently with the guidance and suggestions of the research advisor.

Name: Henok Birhanu Abebe

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of submission: July 2021

Place of submission: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## Acknowledgements

My very first gratitude goes to the Almighty God for His protection and grace. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my family for their unconditional love, support, patience and lifetime investment. Thank you for being my inspirations!

My other round of thanks and appreciation goes to my advisor Dr Samuel Mochona for his humble approach, consistent support and valuable feedback throughout this research. Thank you for sharing your time and valuable knowledge!

I am also in debt to all my friends and colleagues for their countless support throughout my education and while I am writing this research work. I can't thank you enough!

My appreciation and gratitude also extend to all respondents in the Ethiopian Red Cross Society who provided me with important data. Thank you very much for your time, hospitality and valuable information!

# Chapter One

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Due to the changing trends of the digital era, publics of 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. According to sources, social media platforms have generated massive attention and usage among several other internet-based outlets.

Mulugeta (2019) further strengthens this notion with his argument that the development of Web 2.0 and its participative nature attracts a great interest over potential implications on society on a social, political and economic level. He added that one important aspect of the internet's development has been the emergence and growing popularity of social media. He further underlines that social media have influenced the traditional rectilinear pattern of communication by introducing a more interactive and participative one.

So far, there has not been a very clear definition of social media among academics. One reason for this can be the fact that the shape and functionality of social media depend on many factors, which make it constantly change and evolve. Technological factor plays an especially important role in social media dynamics as social media development is directly dependent on the technology and platforms that enable the interactive web's content creation, collaboration and exchange by participants (Etenesh, 2019).

According to the dissected explanation of Sisira (2011), the meaning of the term 'social media' can be derived from two words that constitute it. 'Media' generally refers to advertising and communication of ideas or information through publications/channels. 'Social' implies the interaction of individuals within a group or community. Taken together, social media simply refers to communication/publication platforms that are generated and sustained by the interpersonal interaction of individuals through a specific medium or tool.

Bitima (2019), on the other hand, provided a feature-based definition of social media as: ‘social media are internet-based platforms that enable online users to generate and exchange messages through text, sound, and video; separately or in combination.

Lovejoy et al. 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 (Etenesh, 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 he has notably observed the increased presence and engagement of business brands, public/government institutions and humanitarian /non-governmental 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.

Bearing the wide-ranging opportunities in mind, it is not surprising to observe the apparent shifts in consolidating social media as a Public Relations (PR) tool. And humanitarian organizations are among the forms of institutions that adopted social media as a PR tool.

The Agency for Civil Society Organizations of Ethiopia, which is responsible for registering and overseeing the activities of civil society organizations, stated on its website that there are 326 foreign and 1474 civil society organizations registered in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) is a humanitarian organization permanently operational in Ethiopia since 1935. It is an auxiliary organization to the national government but independent in its operation around the country. The ERCS’s website indicates that ERCS has 11 regional branches, 34 zonal branches and 117 woreda or district branches around Ethiopia.

ERCS is among the humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia that exercise social media as part of its PR activities. Therefore, this research work focuses on examining the practice of using social media as a PR tool with a specific focus on the experiences of the ERCS.

## **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 researcher tried to review some previous studies conducted around the use of social media as a PR tool in a humanitarian or nonprofit organization. For example, Curtis et al. (2010) surveyed 409 nonprofit PR practitioners to find out how nonprofit PR practitioners are adopting social media tools and if they view them as credible using Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Their findings show that social media tools are becoming beneficial methods of communication for public relations practitioners in the nonprofit sector. Organizations with PR departments are more likely to adopt social media technologies and use them to achieve their organizational goals.

Another work by Waters et al. (2009) with the title “*Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook*” investigated how nonprofit organizations use social networking sites to advance their organization’s mission and programs. The study applied content analysis on Facebook profiles of 275 nonprofit organizations in the United States with reference to the strategies of disclosure, information dissemination and involvement.

The results indicated that disclosure was the most often used strategy by nonprofits. But other strategies were not used to their full potential or even ignored. Waters et al. (2009) indicated that the nonprofits covered under this work have not fully applied or used the majority of the Facebook applications available to them in their social networking presence. The researchers also concluded that having a Facebook profile will not in itself increase awareness or trigger participation, rather

it is planning and research that will help nonprofits to establish relationships with their stakeholders via social networking sites.

Public communications researchers Seo et al. (2009) examined how transnational NGOs make use of the new media tools (i.e. websites, blogs, podcasts, and wikis) in their PR activities and what factors influence their online PR. Through a survey conducted among 75 communication representatives of transnational NGOs based in the United States, the researchers found that the organization's website is perceived as being the most important new media tool for NGOs, followed by blogs, videocasts, podcasts and wikis. Respondents also indicated that they are investing more time in social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

For the respondents, the most important function of new media is to promote the image of their organization followed by fund-raising, providing information to journalists, interaction with the public and networking with other NGOs. The researchers concluded that organizational capacity and the main objective of the organization were significant predictors of NGOs' new media use in their public relations rather than organizational efficiency and revenue.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) and Nah and Saxton (2012) respectively conducted studies on the 100 largest nonprofits in the United States. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) studied the communicative functions of microblogging services for organizations with a specific focus on Twitter utilization. They found three functions - information (spread information), community (build community) and action (mobilize supporters). They indicated that the adoption of social media appears to present the adoption of new paradigms of public engagement.

Nah and Saxton (2012), on the other hand, investigated the drives for organizational adoption and use of social media and concluded that four internal and external factors - organizational strategies, capacities, governance features and external pressures/environment - play a part in social media adoption and utilization. They added that the adoption of social media helps to maintain and maximize organizational resources.

When it comes to the local experience, there are studies investigating recent efforts of using social media platforms as a PR tool among organizations and PR practitioners in Ethiopia. For instance, research conducted by Daniel (2019) studied the use of social media as a Government Communication tool in the Addis Ababa City Government Mayor's Office. In this work, Daniel (2019) tried to analyze how the staff of the Mayor's office understand the potential use of social media as a Government Communication tool, frequency of use of social media by the office, opportunities and challenges of social media as a Government Communication tool and driving factors for using social media by the office.

He stated that all the respondents to the research perceive social media as a helpful tool for government communication and it can provide a better chance of quickly reaching their publics and it can also help to practice accountability by different bodies of government. The results also indicated that the Mayor's office is frequently involved in social media platforms through its official Facebook and Telegram pages.

According to this work, the drives for the Mayor's Office for using social media are to benefit from its simplicity and popularity among the wider community. The results also indicated the availability of enough inputs, assigned professionals and plenty of social media users to target as an advantage to the office. Whereas false information, hatred comments, limited human resource and skill gap among professionals are identified as challenges.

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.

Similarly, Etenesh (2019) conducted an assessment in Tigray Public Relations Bureau on the role of social media in PR with a specific case of Facebook. Her findings revealed that the Bureau's



Facebook page played an important role in connecting the Bureau/regional administration with its publics using a limited budget. The major challenges to run the Facebook page are lack of competency, limited material resources and absence of reward to the professionals.

There are also other researchers who examined the use of social media in an organizational setting. To mention three of them, Eskedar (2017) investigated determinants of the effectiveness of social media usage in Ethiopian Airlines, Kibret (2019) conducted a comparative study on the use and management of social media by PR professionals in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Ethiopia, Wubareg (2019) took the case of the Ethiopian Ministry of Innovation and Technology to research the use of social media as a PR tool.

However, as per the knowledge of this research, no previous studies were conducted on the use of social media as a PR tool among humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia. Therefore, this research work attempts to fill this gap by studying the practice and challenges of using social media as a PR tool among humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia with a specific focus on the ERCS.

### **1.3 General and Specific Objectives**

#### **1.3.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this research is to study the practices of using social media as a PR tool in the ERCS.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the research are:

1. To assess how the ERCS is adopting social media as a PR tool.
2. To investigate the drives for adopting social media as a PR tool by the ERCS.
3. To examine the nature of messages conveyed through the ERCS's social media outlets.
4. To examine the opportunities and challenges of using social media as a PR tool in the ERCS.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

This work has the following research questions:

1. How is the ERCS adopting social media as a PR tool?
2. Why is the ERCS adopting social media as a PR tool?
3. What is the nature of messages conveyed through the ERCS's social media outlets?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges of using social media as a PR tool in the ERCS?

## **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 first insight to understand how social media can be used as a PR tool in a humanitarian organization. In addition, as it is not previously studied, this research will help to get an understanding of how social media is used/utilized by the ERCS as a PR tool.

The results of this work may serve as an input to further develop/improve the social media strategies and activities of the ERCS, in particular, and other humanitarian organizations in general. The research outcome may also benefit researchers, academicians, scientific societies and policymakers as a source, and it might also encourage further studies in the area.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Though there are many other local and international humanitarian 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 ERCS. This is because the ERCS is among humanitarian organizations that employed social media as a PR tool earlier than others. Plus, it is among senior humanitarian organizations with the jurisdiction of covering the entire country and has diverse target publics.

The ERCS has branch offices in each region of the country. But the study is conducted 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 ERCS's social media use by stressing its PR activities on the platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Additionally, this study is limited to qualitatively analyzing selected social media messages from the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms published in the time frame of one year (March 1, 2020, to March 1, 2021) on the topics of COVID-19 and donation requests. These topics are selected because they are among the main duties of the ERCS, for the frequency of messages during this time frame and for their recency.

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

### **1.7 Limitation of the Study**

The study is reserved in using the qualitative method of research, and an in-depth interview was only conducted with the head of the ERCS'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 doesn't include feedback from social media followers or the social media public of the ERCS.

Social media use in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon and is not widely researched. Therefore, the researcher was particularly challenged in finding resources about the social media activities of humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia. Hence, the researcher reviewed findings available from other countries.

### **1.8 Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five main chapters. Chapter one gives a general introduction to the study by discussing the general background, statement of the problem, general and specific objectives, research questions, significance, scope and limitation of the study. Chapter two discuss reviewed literature relevant to this research. Chapter three explain the research methods employed to conduct this study, followed by the data presentation and discussion of findings in chapter four. Finally, a summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations of the researcher presented in chapter five.

## Chapter Two

### 2. Review of Related Literature

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 a humanitarian or non-governmental organization, an organizational highlight of the ERCS and the theory selected for this study.

#### 2.1. The Concept of Social Media

##### 2.1.1. What is Social Media?

The term “Social Media”, much like the websites the term denotes, is constantly changing and fluid in its purpose and composition. The label has been used for a large number of internet entities, so much so that the uniting thread between them is fairly simple: instant communication and interaction (Mullaney, 2012).

The online version of Merriam-Webster Dictionary presents the term social media as: “*A noun, plural in form but singular or plural in construction, which refers to the forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).*” Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary defines social media as: “*Forms of media that allow people to communicate and share information using the internet or mobile phones.*”

Austin et al. (2012) borrowed Wright & Hinson’s (2009) definition and stated that social media are digital tools and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between audiences and organizations. For Austin et al. (2012) social media are not limited to the widely popular platforms of Facebook and Twitter, rather, social media includes a range of types relevant to the study of applied communication, such as blogs, micro-blogs, forums, photo and video sharing, Wikis, social bookmarking, and social networking.

Mangold & Faulds (2009) similarly stated that social media is a combination of various online platforms that allow communication between organizations and their customers and among individuals by creating an online dialog through commenting on blogs or pictures, as well as establishing networking relationships with the online community.

Houston et al. (2014) referred to other sources and presented that social media (which may also be referred to as social networking or Web 2.0) is a broad term for a variety of web-based platforms and services that allow users to develop public or semi-public profiles and/or content, and to connect with other users' profiles and/or content.

Huston et al. (2014) further explained that specific social media platforms and services vary both in their focus (such as digital sharing of specific content forms, social gaming) and in their optimization for different computing devices (such as desktop versus mobile computing devices), yet as a broad category, social media ultimately are platforms and services that offer users the opportunity to publish content, to connect with other people, and to engage in conversation.

Taprial & Kanwar (2012) indicated that there are hundreds of definitions for the term social media and new ones are added daily as the concepts keep changing and evolving with time. Following their assessment of several definitions of the term, they tried to describe social media in short as:

*All web-based applications which allow for the creation/exchange of user-generated content and enable interaction between the users can be classified as "Social Media". And these could be in the form of Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Friendster, Google Plus), Blogs, Internet forums, Bookmarking sites, online community sites and Q & A sites etc.*

From a public relations perspective, Lariscy et al. (2009) defined social media as: “*online practices that utilize technology and enable people to share content, opinions, experiences, insights, and media themselves.*”

After going through the above discussions and other definitions of social media, the researcher understood the concept of social media as a web-based [Web 2.0] platforms or applications that are diverse in their features and functions and allowing purposeful creation, exchange and

consumption of digital contents to create new or sustain existing virtual communication among users of the platforms.

### **2.1.2. Features of Social Media**

Many of the feature-based definitions of social media indicated that social media platforms are constructed on Web 2.0. According to Wilson et al. (2011), Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the Web, wherein interoperable, user-centered web applications and services promote social connectedness, media and information sharing, user-created content, and collaboration among individuals and organizations.

Manning (2014) underlined that not everything digital is necessarily social media. In other words, everything operating on the Web is not social media unless it meets some important characteristics of a social media application.

Manning (2014) further suggested two common characteristics of social media. First, social media allow some form of participation. Social media are never completely passive, even if sometimes social networking sites such as Facebook may allow passive viewing of what others are posting. Usually, at a bare minimum, a profile must be created that allows for the beginning of the potential for interaction. Second, and in line with their participatory nature, social media involve interaction. This interaction can be with established friends, family, or acquaintances or with new people who share common interests or even a common acquaintance circle.

Saxena (2017) identified nine key features of social media sites. These are: Provide free webspace, provide a free web address, ask members to build profiles, encourage members to upload content, allow members to build conversations, allow live chats, direct Messaging facility, provide tagging alerts and enable members to create unique pages.

A list prepared by Taprial and Kanwar (2012) summarizes the characteristics of social media. These characteristics are discussed below:

- ❖ **Accessibility:** Social media is easy to use and does not require any special skills, knowledge to use. It is simple to connect with others and be a part of communities and anyone with online access can use social media to initiate or participate in the conversations.
- ❖ **Speed:** The content that you create on social media is available to everyone in your network/forum/community as soon as you publish it. You can communicate with your audience without any external factors affecting the delivery of your message. The responses are also fast, and thus you can have a dialogue, which is almost in real-time.
- ❖ **Interactivity:** Social media affords two way or multiple communication channels. Users can interact with each other; ask questions, discuss products/services, share opinions and anything else they might be interested in doing.
- ❖ **Longevity/volatility:** Social media content remains accessible for a long time, maybe forever, because of the nature of the medium. In addition, the content can be edited/updated anytime.
- ❖ **Reach:** The Internet offers an unlimited reach to all content available. Anyone can access it from anywhere, and anyone can reach, potentially, everyone.

### 2.1.3. Types of Social Media

According to the observation of the researcher, social media are diverse in their types and features. Similarly, different scholars and sources suggest varying types of social media. For instance, Fraustino et al. (2012) provided some examples of social media including blogs and micro-blogs (such as Blogger, Twitter, WordPress), discussion forums (such as Quora, Reddit), digital content sharing platforms (such as Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube), social gaming sites (such as Gree, Mobage, Zynga) and social networking sites (such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Mixi, Orkut).

By considering their functions, Foreman (2017) on the other hand listed ten types of social media. This list will be discussed as follow: -

- **Social networks:** sometimes called “relationship networks,” help people and organizations (brands) connect online to share information and ideas. Examples are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.
- **Media sharing networks:** give people and brands a place to find and share media online, including photos, video, and live video. Examples are Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube.
- **Discussion forums:** are one of the oldest types of social media to find, discuss, and share news, information, and opinions. These are the sites where people go to find out what everyone’s talking about and weigh in on it—and users on these sites generally aren’t shy about expressing their opinions as the sites allow them to keep their anonymity. Examples are Reddit, Quora and Digg.
- **Bookmarking and content curation networks:** help people discover, save, share, and discuss new and trending content and media. These networks are the source of creativity and inspiration for people seeking information and ideas. Examples are Pinterest and Flipboard.
- **Consumer review networks:** give people a place to review and share brands, businesses, products, services, travel spots, and just about anything else. Examples are Yelp, Zomato and TripAdvisor.
- **Blogging and publishing networks:** give people and brands tools to publish content online in formats that encourage discovery, sharing, and commenting. These networks range from more traditional blogging platforms like WordPress and Blogger to microblogging services like Tumblr and interactive social publishing platforms like Medium.



- **Social shopping networks:** make ecommerce engaging by adding a social element. People use them to spot trends, follow brands, share great finds and make purchases. Examples are Polyvore, Etsy and Fancy.
- **Interest-based networks:** take a more targeted approach than the big social networks do by focusing solely on a single subject, such as books, music or home design. They help people to connect with others around a shared interest or hobby. Examples are Goodreads, Houzz and Last.fm.
- **‘Sharing economy’ networks:** also called “collaborative economy networks,” connect people online for the purpose of advertising, finding, sharing, buying, selling, and trading products and services. Examples are Airbnb, Uber and Taskrabbit.
- **Anonymous social networks:** While major social networks are making increasing efforts to hold users accountable for their social activity, these sites go the other way and allow users to post content anonymously. Examples are Whisper, Ask.fm and After School.

The researcher learned from the lists of types of social media by Foreman (2017) and other scholars that there is no clear-cut boundary of purpose for each category. Foreman (2017) explained this scenario with two cases among others. In the first case, he showed that the lines between media sharing networks and social networks are blurring as social relationship networks like Facebook and Twitter add live video, augmented reality and other multimedia services to their platforms.

In the second case, he presented that elements of e-commerce appear in many other types of social networks—for example, Pinterest features Buyable Pins, and Instagram provides call-to-action tools in the form of “shop now” and “install now” buttons.

The researcher also observed a distinction among scholars in identifying platforms to a specific category of social media. The Twitter platform can be a good example of this. Fraustino et al. (2012) and sources used by Houston et al. (2014) and Ameyu (2015) recognized Twitter as a micro-blog. Whereas, Foreman (2017) and Mullaney (2012) identify it as a social networking site. For the purpose of this research work, the writer recognizes Twitter as a social networking site.

#### **2.1.4. Major Functions and Drawbacks of Social Media**

Most of the functions of social media were highlighted in the previous sessions of this work while discussing definitions, features and types of social media. This session will help in summarizing some of the major functions of social media and their possible drawbacks identified by other pieces of literature.

McPherson (2014) acknowledged social media as the latest sequence of technological transformations that are changing the production, transmission, consumption and associated evaluation of information. His statement underlines the moving trends in the overall production and flow of information brought by the introduction of social media. Freberg et al. (2013) also supported the same idea by stating that with the increased use of technology, more individuals are getting their information from the Internet and in particular from social media.

George et al. (2013) noted that social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are powerful symbols of a new generation of online tools and applications that foster user-generated content, social interaction and real-time collaboration. They added that in the early 21st century, the powerful connectivity achieved by modern digital tools has led to remarkable human achievements across the globe from the overthrowing of autocratic regimes through public uprisings coordinated on Facebook and Twitter to the collective solution of complex mathematical problems across wikis.

Madianou (2013) argued that internet-based communication [especially social media] will ease campaigners' effort in bringing their issues forward as they are no longer dependent on traditional gatekeepers in order to reach potentially large audiences. This can have consequences for the range of issues that acquire visibility in the public domain.

Houston et al. (2014) re-visited the works of Jaeger et al. and Keim and Noji and discussed the advantages of social media over traditional media. According to them, Jaeger et al. identified the greater capacity, dependability and interactivity of web-based social media technologies over the traditional media.

Similarly, they referred to the description of Keim and Noji on the advantages of social media in comparison to traditional media in terms of information flow, information control, adaptability, relevance for local residents, intelligence, empowerment, dependency, cost, accessibility, and timeliness of the information.

As Guo and Saxton (2013) presented, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media sites have introduced new convening platforms for organizations to facilitate relationship building and stakeholder engagement. Social media are claimed to help organizations engage present and potential stakeholders by sharing, cooperating and mobilizing joint actions in near-real-time).

Nah and Saxton (2012) claimed that organizations more focused on acquiring funds through external sources [which significantly includes NGOs] are more likely to adopt and utilize technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter, that enable them to reach and interact with a broader set of potential donors.

Guo and Saxton (2013) showed previous evidence that social media's interactive, [and] decentralized environment offers a low-cost way for organizations to mobilize supporters, foster dialogic interactions with large audiences and attract attention to issues that might otherwise be ignored by traditional media.

Social media has not been without its critiques, as cultural observers have come to question its effect on depth of thought and attention spans. The natures of sites like Facebook and Twitter capture tiny bits of life in 140-character bits and pieces. The most-watched YouTube videos are rarely longer than a couple of minutes, perhaps because its layout includes "suggested videos" and encourages flipping between endless arrays of short, easy-to-digest media content (Mullaney, 2012).

One of the primary concerns associated with social media is the reliability of the information that is transmitted. Because social media's primary attribute is immediacy, it is impossible to have a

verification mechanism that would be able to evaluate the truthfulness of every tweet and status update (Mullaney, 2012).

A study conducted by Drahošová and Balco (2017) in European Union indicated that social media might cause internet addiction, lack of security, information overload, loss of social contacts and the increased percentage of time spent on social media. Though it might need further research to prove it, the researcher assumes that this result might apply to other parts of the world outside the European Union as well.

Turano (2017) discussed the downsides of social media such as potential communication breakdown due to immense messages in the platform, misuses and abuses in communication due to lack of regulation and control, lack of capacity to manage the platform, spreading of malicious, exaggerated, inaccurate and false information.

The researcher supports these arguments by Turano (2017) because it is appropriate to regulate social media to avoid potential damage to social cohesion and reputation. Unless the nature of social media platforms in swiftly disseminating information is controlled, they might be misused to spread misinformation and disinformation. The recent horrific experiences in Ethiopia and Myanmar (Burma) show the possible devastating effects of social media unless proper caution is applied.

Turano (2017) also presented Lindsay's discussion of technological limitations including problems in WIFI connections and high administrative costs for staff or team who will manage the activities.

## **2.2. Social Media as a Public Relations Tool**

### **2.2.1. What is Public Relations?**

Tench and Yeomans (2009) noted that Public Relations (PR) is used in a huge range of industries and each one requires different skills and competencies among practitioners. Similar to the concept of social media, as observed by the researcher, scholars from different stances provided definitions for the concept of PR, which mostly are descriptive.

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.

Tench and Yeomans (2009) stated that Harlow, among the pioneer scholars in PR, found 472 different definitions of PR coined between 1900 and 1976. Tench and Yeomans (2009) then presented the following definition built by Harlow:

*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 portray PR as a vital and independent management function assisting to create new and maintain existing two-way communication and understanding as well as acceptance and collaboration between the organization and its publics. The researcher also learned from the definition that PR can also play a role in managing problems or crises that might potentially damage the reputation of the organization.

The role of PR in assisting the management or decision-makers of the organization is additionally indicated in Harlow's definition. Accordingly, PR helps in three ways. First, it reminds the management to understand and respond to the public opinion and interest. Second, it supports organizational change through exercising its coaching, training and consulting role. Third, by referring to previous experiences and developing possible scenarios, PR can help in systematically predicting the outcomes of management actions and possible reactions from their publics. It is important to note from the definition that PR uses research techniques to scientifically study its activities. Professional ethics is another important pillar while discharging PR duties.

Among the many competing definitions of public relations, Grunig and Hunt's is the most widely cited definition of PR that reads "*PR is the management of communication between an organization and its publics.*" One reason this definition is so successful is its parsimony or using few words to convey much information (Schmitz, 2012). Schmitz (2012) not only presented Grunig and Hunt's definition of PR, he further dissected its component parts as follow:

- **Management:** The body of knowledge on how best to coordinate the activities of an enterprise to achieve effectiveness.
- **Communication:** Not only sending a message to a receiver but also understanding the messages of others through listening and dialogue.
- **Organization:** Any group organized with a common purpose; in most cases, it is a business, a corporation, a governmental agency, or a nonprofit group.
- **Publics:** Any group(s) of people held together by a common interest. They differ from audiences in that they often self-organize and do not have to attune to messages; the publics differ from stakeholders in that they do not necessarily have a financial stake tying them to specific goals or consequences of the organization. Targeted audiences, on the other hand, are publics who receive a specifically targeted message that is tailored to their interests.

### **2.2.2. Social Media as a Public Relations Tool**

Internet and digitalization in a broader sense are changing the nature of PR like other functions of organizations. PR function in organizations is undergoing a huge change in terms of the tools it is using. Thanks to the internet, professionals of public relations do not depend on traditional media to communicate with the interest groups (Gulerman and Apaydin, 2017).

Annual reports and news releases, common tools of printed media, are replaced with digital tools such as websites and e-mails. Some academicians put forward that new tools such as social media have high potential to contribute to brand awareness, the reputation of the organizations and customer service (Gulerman and Apaydin, 2017).

Social media offers numerous opportunities for public relations practitioners to interact with the public while adopting new forms of technology and integrating them into their everyday lives. These advances in technology have experienced widespread use among public relations practitioners and journalists (Eyrich et al., 2008; Lariscy et al., 2009; Porter et al., 2009, in Curtis et al., 2010).

While discussing the purposes of using social media, Freberg et al. (2013) noted that social media can help to establish a virtual community, where individuals can share information and create a virtual dialog among organizations and individuals. Furthermore, social media can also serve as a tool for organizations to monitor and listen to what their key stakeholders are saying. In other words, if they are exploited to their full potential, social media can support organizational PR activity through sharing of information, feedback management and environment scanning or social media story monitoring relevant to the organization.

Waters et al. (2009) noted that social media provide a variety of ways for users to become involved with organizations. They discussed the findings of Waters to show how nonprofit organizations can use social media, including to streamline their management functions, interact with volunteers and donors and educate others about their programs and services. They added that through interactions with stakeholders on Facebook and other social media applications, organizations seek to develop relationships with important publics.

Curtis et al. (2010) similarly forwarded their recommendation that as more forms of social media emerge, it is beneficial for PR practitioners to understand how to use these tools as they directly relate to their jobs.

For-profit organizations have used these sites to help launch products and strengthen their existing brands; however, little is known about how nonprofit organizations are taking advantage of the social networking popularity (Waters et al., 2009). This research work, therefore, aims to understand how humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia are using social media as a PR tool with a specific focus on the ERCS.

## **2.3. Internet and Social Media Use in Ethiopia**

### **2.3.1. Internet Use in Ethiopia**

International Telecommunication Union (2002) indicated that the use of the internet in Ethiopia began in 1993 when the UN Economic Commission for Africa, whose headquarters are in Addis Ababa, established a store-and-forward email service called PADISNet (Pan African Documentation and Information Service Network).

As indicated in the same source, because no other services were available, the facility was heavily used by international organizations and NGOs, but also by some academics, individuals and private companies. In the following year [1994], the US-based NGO, HealthNet, established a node at the Medical Faculty of the University of Addis Ababa, which provided e-mail access to medical researchers via the HealthSat/VITA Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite.

Ameyu (2015) claimed that from the onset, the internet was a luxurious service for the mass in Ethiopia as it used to improve communications among organizations. He further added that even though the service was very limited it was not open for wide use until 1997, a year internet service began to be delivered by an organization named Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation (ETC) [the now Ethio Telecom].

The online statistics report by We Are Social and Hootsuite revealed that there were 21.14 million internet users in Ethiopia in January 2020, with a 19% penetration rate out of the total 113.5 million



population. The number of internet users in Ethiopia increased by 534 thousand (+2.6%) between 2019 and 2020. The statistics also indicated that 56.7% of users accessed the internet from mobile phones, 42.4 % accessed from laptops and desktops, and 0.9% accessed from tablet computers.

The only telecom and internet service provider in Ethiopia, Ethio Telecom, indicated on its website that the internet speed has now reached 4<sup>th</sup> Generation (4G/LTE) and LTE advanced are introduced in Addis Ababa and its surrounding.

### **2.3.2. Social Media Use in Ethiopia**

Previous works reviewed by the researcher (Lisanu (2020), Tesfaye (2013), Sileshie (2014), Meseret (2020), Feyisa and Dawit (2018), Dawit (2019) and Daniel (2019)) recognized that social media use and its influence is increasing in Ethiopia. Some of these works also indicated that organizations have started to consolidate social media in their communications strategies.

Though it needs further research, the writer perceives that social media users are concentrated in specific areas of the country where the internet and devices to manipulate social media platforms are accessible at the same time.

Numbers from the online statistics report of We Are Social, and Hootsuite indicated that there were 6.20 million social media users in Ethiopia in January 2020, which accounts for 5.5% of the total population. The number of social media users in Ethiopia increased by 237 thousand (+4.0%) between April 2019 and January 2020. According to the statistics, the significant majority of social media users (97%) are accessing social media via their mobile devices.

Following the growing misuse of social media as well as to minimize or suppress adverse effects of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in Ethiopia, the government introduced a new proclamation in the title '*Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation*' or Proclamation NO. 1185 /2020.

As stated in the Proclamation, its main objectives are to ensure that individuals will not engage in speech that incites violence while they exercise their freedom of expression. The proclamation

recognized that hate speech is likely to cause public disturbance or promotes hatred and discrimination against a person or an identifiable group or community based on ethnicity, religion, race, gender or disability. It also has the objectives of promoting tolerance, civil discourse, dialogue, mutual respect and understanding by controlling and suppressing the dissemination and proliferation of hate speech, disinformation and other related false and misleading information.

The Proclamation underlined and indicated different levels of punishments against disseminating hate speech through broadcasting, print or social media outlets using messages in text, image, audio or video formats.

Some sources reviewed by the researcher with regards to this proclamation showed their concern in the balanced application of it in line with respecting freedom of expression. For instance, Wanyama (2020) stated that besides having overbroad and ambitious definitions that are subject to misinterpretation and abuse, the new law also weighs heavily on social media users and intermediaries, and introduces harsh penalties, contrary to international human rights instruments, including articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.

The researcher of this work believes in the necessity of legal frameworks that are controlling the misuse of social media and other communication outlets. The researcher also shares concerns about the proper implementation of the proclamation without compromising the freedom of expression that is guaranteed under the constitution of the country. This highly requires the transparent and independent exercise of power by all concerned bodies of the government (especially the legislative and executive organs).

#### **2.4. The Concept of Humanitarian or Non-Governmental Organization**

Humanitarian action is the active provision of humanitarian aid: aid designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and restore and promote human dignity in the wake of disasters and during large-scale emergencies (Pringle and Hunt, 2015).

There is a distinction in framing and understanding humanitarian action. According to Pringle and Hunt (2015), it can be perceived as political or nonpolitical, as secular or non-secular, as a movement or an institution, and as short-term emergency response or longer-term development and guided by or apart from humanitarian principles.

The writer of this research work observed that the terms Humanitarian Organization, Non-Governmental Organization, Not for Profit Organization and Civil Society Organization are interchangeably used in many other research and open-source documents.

As cross-referred and presented by Bennett and Segerberg (2012), organizational hybridity makes it difficult to apply fixed categories to many organizations as they variously shift from being issue advocacy NGOs to policy think tanks to Social Movement Organizations running campaigns or protests to multi-issue organizations, to being networking hubs for connective action.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) further explained that depending on when, where, and how one observes an organization, it may appear differently as an NGO, SMO, INGO, TNGO, NGDO (non-governmental organization, social movement organization, international non-governmental organization, transnational non-governmental organization, non-governmental development organization), an interest advocacy group, a political networking hub, and so on.

In 1945, the term “non-governmental organization” first appeared in the United Nations Charter after World War II. However, these types of organizations had already existed for many years, advocating for causes such as women’s rights and the end of slavery. Today, there are thousands of NGOs around the world ([www.humanrightscareers.com](http://www.humanrightscareers.com)).

The online version of *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines NGOs as ‘*voluntary group of individuals or organizations, usually not affiliated with any government, that is formed to provide services or to advocate a public policy.*’ It also added that NGOs run a range of human concerns (e.g., human rights, environmental protection, disaster relief, and development assistance), and the scope of their activities may be local, national, or international. NGOs may be financed by private donations, international organizations, governments, or a combination of these.

As per the summary of Lewis (2009), NGOs can have three critical roles. The first is the implementer role in mobilizing resources to provide goods and services in fields like healthcare, microfinance, agricultural extension, emergency relief and human rights to people who need them. Second is the catalyst role in inspiring, facilitating or contributing to improved thinking and action through activities like grassroots organizing and group formation, gender and empowerment work, lobbying and advocacy work and influencing policy process through innovation and entrepreneurship. Lastly, NGOs have a partner role to work with the government, donors, the private sector and communities on joint activities such as socially responsible business initiatives.

For this research work, the writer understands a humanitarian organization or NGO as an independent organization which is working to alleviate social problems and human suffering caused by natural and/or human-made disasters. The writer also recognizes the above three summaries of roles by Lewis (2009) to understand the purposes of humanitarian organizations or NGOs.

## **2.5. Origin and Components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was inspired and started in 1863 by Swiss businessman Henry Dunant. He proposed creating national relief societies, made up of volunteers, trained in peacetime to provide neutral and impartial help to relieve suffering in times of war (<https://www.redcross.org.uk>).

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a global humanitarian network of 80 million people that helps those facing disaster, conflict and health and social problems. The Movement is made up of almost 97 million volunteers, supporters, and staff in 191 countries (ICRC and IFRC, 2007, [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)).

The movement is pillared by seven Fundamental Principles - Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. The Fundamental Principles are an expression of the values and ideals around which the Movement is united, and they are a call to action for Movement volunteers and staff (ICRC and IFRC, 2015).

As stated on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) website ([www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)), there are three independent but collaborating components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. These are the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The following paragraphs will discuss these three components, as presented by the ICRC website.

The ICRC is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavors to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening International Humanitarian Law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The second component is the IFRCS. The IFRCS works to inspire, facilitate and promote all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. Founded in 1919, the Federation directs and coordinates international assistance of the Movement, to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and in health emergencies. It acts as the official representative of its member Societies in the international field.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 189 countries [reached 192 national societies]. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including, disaster relief, health and social programmes. During wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and support the army medical services where appropriate.

All National Societies must first be recognized by the ICRC, based on a set of conditions for recognition, in order to become part of the Movement. Subsequently, they may become members of the IFRCS, the National Societies' umbrella organization. The ERCS, our target organization for this study, is a member of the IFRCS since 1935.

## 2.6. Origin and Functions of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society

The efforts to establish a national Society in Ethiopia is traced back to the Battle of Adwa; the Ethio-Italian war of 1896. The Russian Red Cross medical team arrived in Ethiopia on August 5, 1896 and cared for about 250 wounded returnee soldiers. These humanitarian acts inspired the establishment of the Ethiopian Red Cross Doctors Society in 1896 by Empress Taitu Bitul (Elias, 2020).

Establishing a national Society for Ethiopia was initiated by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Due to local initiatives and foreign concerns, the ERCS was established on July 8, 1935, in Addis Ababa. The Society began its involvement in humanitarian services by training and deploying first aid providers and ambulances service to various war fronts (Elias, 2020).

The ERCS is auxiliary to the government, and yet it is an independent humanitarian organization. It was established and recognized by law through a National Charter enacted in the Negarit Gazzetta in 1947. The Charter has undergone various parliamentary revisions, the last being endorsed by the Parliament in January 2018 ([www.redcrosseth.org](http://www.redcrosseth.org)).

Proclamation No.1067/2018 in title '*Ethiopian Red Cross Society Re-establishment Charter Proclamation*' stated that the ERCS is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement which provides the necessary humanitarian aid to victims of armed conflicts and, in general, to all victims of man-made and natural disasters without discrimination based on race, color, nationality, sex, religion, political outlook or any other ground, and fosters understanding, cooperation, friendship and lasting peace among people.

Moreover, the proclamation underlines three major purposes of the ERCS that are aligned or compatible with the Geneva Conventions and the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. These three purposes are:

1. Alleviate human sufferings on the health and lives of human beings caused due to man-made and natural disasters including hostilities, restore family links and help the victims of the disaster rehabilitate quickly;

2. Prevent disaster on the lives and health of human beings caused by natural calamities and hostilities and build community resilience;
3. Work towards humanity, volunteerism and the prevalence of peace for human beings.

The ERCS works in partnership with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners to mobilize technical and financial resources for operations and activities. The Government of Ethiopia is also a major partner providing considerable technical and financial support for the national Society's humanitarian services and community development interventions at all levels (ERCS, 2015).

As shown on the Society's website, the ERCS's communication outreaches and information gateways are addressed through the Image Building and Humanitarian Diplomacy Program which is designed to make the Red Cross and its humanitarian activities near to the people using various digital, broadcast and print media.

The same website listed ERCS's communication tools and affirmed that the website and various main user-generated platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and others will extensively be in use to disseminate information and receive feedback across the country and around the world. For this research work, we will be exclusively concerned with the ERCS's application of digital communication tools with an in-depth focus on its social media use.

## **2.7. Theoretical Framework**

Researchers can define theory as a statement of relationships between units observed or approximated in the empirical world. Approximated units mean constructs, which by their very nature cannot be observed directly (Walker, 1998).

Kivunja (2018) borrowed Kerlinger and Lee's definition of the concept of theory as "*a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena.*" From the definition, we can learn that theory is composed of ideas, elaborations

and claims that help to systematically explain and predict a certain phenomenon by identifying and understanding variables.

According to Walker (1998), a theory is composed of four important components: (a) definitions, (b) a domain of applicability, (c) a set of relationships of variables, and (d) specific predictions or factual claims.

For some, it might sound that social media is a recent phenomenon that is difficult to explain using theory. But scholars in communication studies used theory to explain social media from a variety of perspectives. For instance, Nah and Saxton (2012) discussed the Contingency Theory of Canel to explain organizational variation in public relations strategies. Nah and Saxton (2012) again discussed the Diffusion of Innovations Theory by Rogers to understand if there is a direct link between the previous experience of using a website with the current adoption of social media by organizations.

The Actor-Network Theory of Latour (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) also recognized that digital networking mechanisms, like social media and devices that run them, are potential network agents alongside human actors (i.e. individuals and organizations).

Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) stated that Social Media Engagement Theory can help to account the role of technology as the underlying platform needed to facilitate social interactions among users that are globally and temporally distributed. They also understated that the rise of social media comes in large part from the evolution of technology to provide a unique user experience that enables users to connect in new ways that were never before possible.

Moreno and Koff (2016) explained the Media Ecology Theory by McLuhan, who claimed that the media act directly to shape and organize culture. Moreno and Koff (2016) said that Media Ecology can help us to understand why people continue to interact online, despite somewhat of a loss of control over their public and private boundaries.



According to Pan and Crotts (2012), some traditional theories, such as Social Exchange Theory, Social Penetration Theory and Social Network Theory, could be valid paradigms for studying and explaining how people form networks, express their opinions and pass information to each other.

Most of the theories reviewed by the researcher are user-centric and they try to elaborate on the intentions of using social media from individual users' perspectives. Among organization-based theories recommended by researchers to study social media (such as engagement model as used by McPherson (2014) and Di Gangi and Wasko (2016), Contingency Theory, resource mobilization theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory as applied by Nah and Saxton (2012)) the researcher is convinced that affordance theory is the most relevant theory for this paper. Affordance theory is discussed in the following sub-section.

### **2.7.1. Affordance Theory**

Scholars who worked on affordance theory put James Gibson at the forefront in coining, formulating and conceptualizing the theory. As noted by Blewett and Hugo (2016), the term affordance was introduced by James Gibson in 1977 in his article '*The Theory of Affordances*' and then expounded in more detail in his later works where he framed it as an 'ecological approach' to perception.

Originally founded in ecological psychology (Hafezieh and Eshraghian, 2017), affordance theory was developed in an effort to explain how animals perceive their environment (Treem and Leonardi, 2012) and what the environment can offer relative to the animals' needs (water, food, shelter, and other specific needs of a specific type of animal) (Turano, 2017).

For Turano (2017) and Yang (2017), who borrowed Gibson's (1979) idea, affordances indicate what a thing/environment/object and its properties can offer, provide, furnish whether good or bad/ill to an individual/animal.

According to Yang (2017), the affordance of the environment is realized through the interaction between the organism and the environment. It addresses the complementary relationship between

the abilities of an organism and the features of the environment. While explaining environmental affordance, he also emphasized the dynamic relation between organisms and the environment.

According to Siegert et al. (2020) affordance perspective by Gibson is based on the idea that humans relate to inanimate objects differently, depending on their background, experiences and environment. Objects are thus perceived in terms of the opportunities for action that they afford. In other words, the affordance of an object and interaction with it is significantly dependent on the person's experience, situation, identified potential and intended action or output.

In the same way, Treem and Leonardi (2012) elaborated that although the features of an object are common to each person who encounters them, the affordances of that artifact are not. They added that affordances are unique to the particular ways in which an actor, or a set of actors, perceives and uses the object. Moreover, because the material out of which an object is made can provide multiple affordances, it is possible that one object can produce multiple outcomes.

Developing on this, the next major advance of the term [affordance] was when Donald Norman appropriated the term into the context of human-computer interaction (HCI) (Blewett and Hugo, 2016). However, different from the concept of 'affordance,' Norman (1988) introduced the concept of 'perceived affordance,' which he distinguished by arguing that it is the perceived affordances of an object that determine the usability of an object, not all the possible affordances of an object (Yang, 2017).

Although Gibson referred to manmade objects or tools, it was Norman's work that introduced affordances in technology design by focusing on everyday objects. Norman's (1988) original view of the concept as the perceived [perceived affordances] and actual properties [real affordances] of objects is in contrast with Gibson's perspective (Hafezieh and Eshraghian, 2017). Norman explained real affordances as the functions attached to a given object—what, potentially, that object affords. Whereas, perceived affordances are features that are clear to the user (Davis and Chouinard, 2017).

Norman regarded the affordances of an object as being determined by how an individual perceives the object shall be used, rather than how an object can actually be used or how many ways it can be used (Yang, 2017). This means, as the researcher understands Norman's position, it is the perceived affordance that decides the usability of the object rather than the real affordance.

Yang (2017) summarized the difference between Gibson and Norman's understanding of affordances as follow:

*In general, the key difference between Gibson and Norman's understanding of affordances lies [lays] at if the "affordances" of an object can be perceived or not, i.e., in Gibson's definition, an affordance exist[s] regardless of an individuals'['s] capability to see it or not, it exists objectively; while, in Norman's definition, an affordance exists when an individual, based on his/her previous experience, education,..., which is subjectively existing.*

Besides its growing popularity among the academic circle, affordance theory is also criticized by some scholars. Davis and Chouinard (2017) noted critiques on Gibson's conceptualization of artifacts as he is giving too much efficacy for artifacts. Others who have been referred by Davis and Chouinard (2017) disagree with Norman's claim by arguing that artifacts only afford what subjects perceive them to afford. Critics also note that the term is employed in many disciplines without providing any definition and/or neglecting to recognize the ongoing definitional variations (Davis and Chouinard, 2017).

### **2.7.2. Social Media Affordances**

As a concept, affordance is integral to scholarly analysis across multiple fields—including media studies, science and technology studies, communication studies, ecological psychology, and design studies among others (Davis and Chouinard, 2017). The same is true for its application in social media studies. According to Hafezieh and Eshraghian (2017), the concept of affordance has witnessed popularity in the context of social media as several scholars adopted the concept to explain the role of social media in organizations.

Treem and Leonardi (2012) argue that defining social media by describing what kinds of behaviors they typically afford across various organizations is one-way researchers can transcend the

particularities of any technology or its features and focus on communicative outcomes. They also stated that defining social media by enumerating its affordances may allow us to understand when, why, and how social media occasion change in organizational practice.

As per the remarks of Yang (2017), the affordances of a social media platform are not merely properties of the platform itself, nor the users' characteristics, but the intersection between these two. He also underlined that affordances could be a routine for many of the consistent users on a social media platform, but it could also be dynamic and flexible among different user groups, under different contextual situations.

Yang (2017) agrees with the viewpoint of "perceived affordance" by Norman, which was discussed in section 2.7.1, with his justification that in the social media realm, various individuals, under various contexts, can use social media platforms for different reasons. The researcher similarly supports this idea with a strong assumption that the same can be concluded for organizational social media use - various organizations in different contexts use social media platforms for meeting different communication objectives.

Different Researchers identified different affordances of social media. For example, Boyd (2010) identified four key affordances for social networking sites; 'persistence' (the storage capacity of the medium and the permanence of its content); 'replicability' (the fact that content can be easily reproduced, copied and therefore disseminated); 'scalability' (the visibility of this content by other users which is not always controlled by the author of the original content); and finally, 'searchability' (the fact that this content is accessed through search). Additionally, users can enjoy varying degrees of privacy and control in social networking sites (Madianou, 2013).

After discussing some of the definitions of affordance, Raja-Yusof et al. (2016) identified twelve key affordances that can be relevant for social media platforms: Individualized affordance, Collective affordance, Shared affordance, Visibility, Editability, Persistence, Association, Visualizing entire work process, Real-time/flexible product and service creation, Virtual collaboration, Mass collaboration and Simulation/synthetic representation.

Treem and Leonardi (2012) introduced a combination of four social media affordances they claimed as helpful to characterize what is new and important about social media for the organizational communication process. These affordances are visibility, persistence, editability and association.

The researcher preferred to focus and further elaborate on these affordances by Treem and Leonardi (2012) because the affordances by other scholars can be addressed by these classifications. And as Siegert et al. (2020) stated, other affordances might fall within, or at least overlap with these classifications. Moreover, the writer assumes that they can provide a framework for understanding the opportunities of social media use in the context of the ERCS.

The four social media affordances proposed by Treem and Leonardi (2012) are briefly discussed as follow:

- ❖ **Visibility:** social media afford users the ability to make their behaviors, knowledge, preferences and communication network connections that were once invisible (or at least very hard to see) visible to others. If social media technologies enable people to easily and effortlessly see information about someone else, we say that the technology was used to make that person's knowledge visible.
- ❖ **Persistence:** the information published on social media remains available to users and does not expire or disappear. As Erickson and Kellogg (2000, cited in Treem and Leonardi, 2012) noted, persistence opens the door to a variety of new uses and practices: conversations may be searched, browsed, replayed, annotated, visualized, restructured, and re-contextualized, with what are likely to be profound impacts on personal, social, and institutional practices.
- ❖ **Editability:** creating, recreating and editing messages to make them more appropriate and correct before it is viewed by others. It is also modifying and updating content that has already used (e.g., editing spelling errors or deleting content). Thus, the communicator retains some degree of control over content after the original communicative display.

- ❖ **Association:** making or establishing connections between individuals-social ties, between individuals and content, or between an actor and a presentation and affiliating with the organization.

Treem and Leonardi (2012) argue that social media differ in that they afford all of these four communicative outcomes simultaneously, and consistently in an organizational setting. They added that the potential presence of all four of these affordances may offer users greater flexibility in the ways that they employ these communication technologies and enact behaviors with them, which in turn could influence organizational communication processes.

The researcher believes that Affordance theory can give a framework in providing answers to the research questions of this study. For instance, in the previous discussion of social media use Yang (2017) mentioned that different user groups in different contexts engage in social media for different reasons. This assumption will help us understand how social media is used in the context of the ERCS and with what drives or purpose.

In their classification of social media affordances, Treem and Leonardi (2012) explained that social media affordance of Editability enable social media users to craft new messages, edit them before they are published and amend them once they are published on the platforms. The same assumption will help this study to know the nature of messages crafted by the ERCS to address its potential social media public.

Furthermore, from an affordance approach, the researcher in this work would ask how the affordances of visibility, persistence, editability and association are relevant to the ERCS in order to understand the opportunities of using social media as a PR tool.

## Chapter Three

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

Research methods include all the techniques and methods which 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 himself with the different steps generally taken to study a research problem. Hence, the scientific approach which is 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/inferences drawn.

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

#### 3.2. Research Design

The open-source [www.questionpro.com](http://www.questionpro.com) defined research design as the framework of research methods and techniques chosen by a researcher that allows researchers to enhance research methods that are suitable for the subject matter and set up their studies for success. In other words, research design determines which tools to use and how they are used by the researcher.

For Grey (2014), the research design sets the procedure on the required data, the methods to be applied to collect and analyze these data, and how all of this is going to answer the research question.

In the following sections and sub-sections, the researcher will discuss sources of data, the data collection methods and analysis through which this work is going to meet its research objectives and provide answers to the research questions.

### **3.3. 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 audio) 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 selected social media outlets of the ERCS were organized, grouped, coded in different themes, and the results were observed to learn the nature of messages conveyed through these social media outlets.

### **3.4. Sources of Data**

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 experts administering the social media outlets of the ERCS through in-depth interviews.

Social media messages published on selected social media accounts of the ERCS were used as a secondary source of data. These messages were used as input for content analysis. Furthermore, secondary data relevant to this study were collected from other research works, journal articles, reports produced by the ERCS, thematic publications and internet-based open sources.



### **3.5. Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1. Sampling**

The researcher used purposive sampling to gather primary data. Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of a population to participate in the study ([www.research-methodology.net](http://www.research-methodology.net)). D'Exelle (2014) also stated that purposive sampling is an intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon.

The head of the communication department and experts who are managing the social media accounts at the headquarter of the ERCS are selected for in-depth interviews. The respondents are selected with the assumption that they can provide accurate information, which can help to answer the research questions of this work.

Moreover, among other digital media outlets of the ERCS, social media accounts of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are selected for content analysis. This is because the selected social media accounts are relatively active, and they have frequently updated content. In addition, the contents in these social media outlets are selected for content analysis with the purpose of further understanding the nature of messages conveyed via the selected outlets.

The time frame selected for analysis was between March 1, 2020, to March 1, 2021. This analysis is only limited to covering messages related to COVID-19 and donation appeals/requests by the ERCS. The time frame and the messages are selected for four important reasons. First, following the organization's regular operation, compared to other times, the social media outlets were frequently updated during the above-mentioned time frame.

Second, during this time, the ERCS was busy responding to the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic and mobilizing resources to provide humanitarian response to people affected by natural disasters and recurrent displacement due to inter-ethnic violence in some parts of the country. Accordingly, the two main issues dominated the ERCS's social media messages during this specific time.

Thirdly, the two activities are among the major duties and capacities assigned to the ERCS under Proclamation No.1067/2018. This gives the chance to investigate how the ERCS is approaching social media to communicate its major duties of responding to national health emergencies and resource/humanitarian assistance mobilization. Fourth, these issues are selected for their recency.

### **3.5.2. Data Collection Tools**

Cropley (2019) and Mohajan (2018) identified methods or tools for collecting data while employing qualitative research design, which includes observation (participant, non-participant and shadowing), case studies, autobiographical narratives, historical and document analyses, Interviews (open, Semi-structured, structured, In-depth and group interviews) and Surveys.

Hence, among the list of data collection tools, an in-depth interview with the head of the communication department and experts handling the social media platforms is selected as an appropriate tool. In addition, qualitative content analysis of selected social media messages from the social media accounts of the ERCS is considered to understand the nature of messages conveyed through these platforms.

#### **3.5.2.1. In-depth Interview**

According to Brounéus (2011), the research method of in-depth interviewing is used to learn individual perspectives of one or a few narrowly defined themes. The questions used to guide the interview are often semi-structured, that is the researcher has formulated a set of questions that all interviewees will be asked.

The researcher of this work believes that semi-structured open-ended questions and follow-up questions to the close-ended ones help to gather clear and detailed information from identified respondents in the ERCS. The interview questions are prepared in the English language, and the interviews were conducted in the Amharic language to avoid language constraints and to enable respondents better express their ideas.

Brounéus (2011) also defined the role of the researcher as an active listener, encouraging the interviewees to give their account by using reflective listening, follow-up questions and probes, but also reflecting on when it is appropriate – and not – to continue asking, and when it is time to close.

Morris (2015) summarized the advantages and weaknesses of the in-depth interview method. The advantages are: allows to access rich personal data, gives the ability to understand an individual's context and motivations, allows follow up and probing of responses and examination of complexity, allows the interviewee to talk about what they think is important, it's an extremely versatile method and non-verbal information can be obtained from observing body language and intonation.

Morris (2015) also claim that like any research method, in-depth interviews do have limitations. These include - interviewee could be presenting inaccurate information, impossible to draw a random sample of interviewees, data obtained cannot be generalized to the population, a large amount of time and effort required to set up interviews, potentially expensive and transcribing is costly and time-consuming.

A semi-structured in-depth interview is applied to answer the research questions raised in the first part of this work. The in-depth interviews were conducted with five respondents. The respondents include the head of the communication department and four experts of the department who are managing the social media platforms at the ERCS.

While analyzing their responses, the interviewees were individually labeled as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, Respondent 4 and Respondent 5. This is done to keep the anonymity of the respondents.

### **3.5.2.2. Qualitative Content Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is commonly used for analyzing qualitative data (Elo et al., 2014). Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Budd, Thorp, and

Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish and Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990, in Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Kondracki et.al (2002) presented that text data might be in verbal, print, or electronic form and might have been obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media such as articles, books, or manuals.

Mayring (2014) states that content analysis is not a standardized instrument that always remains the same; it must be fitted to suit the particular object or material in question and constructed especially for the issue at hand.

For this work, qualitative content analysis was applied to study the nature of messages conveyed through fifty-two (52) contents posted, twitted and uploaded on the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages/channels respectively.

## **Chapter Four**

### **4. Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This study has general and specific objectives to understand the use of social media as a PR tool in the context of the ERCS. Based on these objectives in mind, the researcher has collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews with all the five members of the ERCS's communication department at the headquarter office. This is because all members of the department are involved in the social media activities of the ERCS.

As indicated in chapter 3, selected messages are also gathered from the organization's social media platforms of Facebook (35 messages), Twitter (5 messages) and YouTube (12 messages) for qualitative content analysis. The platforms are selected because they are frequently updated when compared to other digital media outlets of the organization. This section of the research work will discuss the collected data and present their results.

#### **4.1.1 Characteristics of Respondents**

The five respondents of the in-depth interview are selected for their direct or immediate involvement in the social media activities of the ERCS. All the respondents are stationed in the ERCS's Addis Ababa headquarter office under the Humanitarian Diplomacy, Governance and Membership Affairs Department. The department was frequently referred to or addressed by the respondents as 'the communication department'. Similarly, the researcher refers to the same department as 'the communication department' in the following discussions.

The respondents have a service time ranging from Seven (7) months up to nine (9) years in the ERCS. They are serving in the positions of head of department (1 respondent), Senior Communication and Partnership Officers (3 respondents) and Graphics Design, Audio Visual and Documentation Officer (1 respondent).

The participants of the in-depth interview provided an average of forty (40) minutes of audio recorded data. The data, which was recorded in Amharic, was transcribed into fifty-one (51) pages

of text data. And these are again translated into a total of forty-seven (47) pages of English text data.

#### **4.1.2. Social Media Contents and Social Media Channels**

Selected social media messages from the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages/channel were used for content analysis to provide answers to the specific research question inquiring about the nature of messages conveyed through the ERCS's social media outlets.

The ERCS has created a Facebook account in 2013 and gained 49,191 page Likes and 51,630 followers (last checked on May 8, 2021). Similarly, it joined Twitter in 2014 and has 1,646 followers and published 239 tweets as of May 8, 2021. The ERCS also opened a YouTube channel in 2013 to upload videos. It has about 3,700 subscribers and gained a total of 1,383,022 views for all the videos uploaded on the channel (last checked on May 8, 2021).

A total of forty (40) text, photograph, video, website links and artwork posts/tweets from Facebook and Twitter and a total of twelve (12) videos uploaded on YouTube were selected for the content analysis. These contents were coded, described and their findings were used for understanding the nature of messages conveyed through social media platforms the ERCS during the selected time frame.

### **4.2. Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **4.2.1. Adoption of Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS**

Here, the researcher attempted to investigate the standard procedures and practices put in place by the ERCS to use social media as a public relations tool. Respondent 1 confirmed that ERCS's communication department has accepted and adopted social media as a public relations tool. According to this respondent, it has been more than eight years since the ERCS has started using the website and social media as a PR tool.

Respondent 1 also mentioned that not only the communication department, the ERCS's top-level management has also endorsed social media as an important tool, and it is providing the necessary

support to run it. Here, the respondent mentioned three general indicators to show support of the top-level management.

According to this respondent, the indicators are: first, the management gave greenlight to the Information Technology department to develop a website and create social media profile for the organization. Second, the board has approved the communication policy and strategy and reviewed the final draft of the social media guideline. Thirdly, the management has supported the recent social media use training program organized by the communication department.

Contrary to Respondent 1's comment on the management's support of the social media activities, the rest of the respondents believe that very little attention is given to the organization's social media engagement. They mentioned that more attention is paid to the mainstream media coverage rather than social media visibilities.

Respondent 5 explained this scenario as follow:

*For instance, if our activities are not covered by ETV [Ethiopian Television], Fana [Fana Broadcasting Corporate] or other local media, they [the management] assume that it will not get visibility. When we collect information from the field and post it on social media, they [the management] don't assume the value it has.*

Respondent 4 gave a similar remark to the above argument by Respondent 5 and stated that:

*...when we call for a press conference, we want activists and bloggers to participate. They [the management] want EBC [Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation] and FBC [Fana Broadcasting Corporate]. These can indicate that social media has less acceptance.*

While discussing the adoption process of social media as a PR tool by the ERCS, Respondent 1 strictly mentioned the importance of giving strategic guidance to social media activities by saying:

*Our regional branches have already opened their accounts, especially after the prevalence of COVID-19. They are actively working on social media platforms like Telegram. This shows the desire to use social media, and it is important to develop the necessary frameworks and standards. Therefore, we have already finalized the social media guideline, which will be approved by the Society's management and, hopefully, we will start to implement the frameworks in the coming one or two months.*

The same respondent also believes that the guideline will provide directions on the ‘DOs’ and ‘DON’Ts’ of social media use for ERCS’s volunteers and registered members, in line with the Society’s ethical principles.

Regarding the frequency of posts on Facebook, tweets on Twitter and video uploads on YouTube, all expert respondents indicated that there is no specific time or schedule to publish updates. Rather, according to the respondents, social media updates are merely dependent on the availability of events. In addition, Respondent 2 indicated that due to the overlap of other assignments, they might not frequently update their pages, and this might extend to one or two weeks or even for months for platforms like YouTube.

Concerning the planning and evaluation of social media activities, the researcher asked respondents about the availability and implementation of social media Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and activity evaluation mechanisms. According to Respondent 1, the Society has identified general KPIs in its 2020 - 2025 strategic plan. But these KPIs are not yet used to evaluate the organization’s activities in general, and social media activities of the department in particular.

The rest of the respondents also agree that they are not using any of the pre-set KPIs, and some of the respondents expressed that they don’t have technical knowledge about KPIs. Contrary to their replies on their understanding about KPIs, the majority of the respondents mentioned at least one potential KPI to social media when they were asked about their activity reporting process.

All the respondents confirmed that social media activities of the communication department are comprised in the monthly, quarterly and annual reports. Some of the reported items mentioned by the respondents are the number of posts made, the nature of messages conveyed, the number of contents provided to prepare posts, the number of views for posts, and the percentage of achievement of activities compared to the initial plan.

Though the social media activities of the experts are reported, four of the respondents, including the head of the communication department, affirmed that these activities are not directly evaluated or measured as part of the employees’ activity appraisal. Rather, the experts are evaluated as a



team. Respondent 2 on the other hand assumes that the social media activities are consolidated as one of the individual performance evaluation criteria.

Another area of interest to this research is the source of information to prepare the social media contents. Respondent 1 explained their sources of information and the content gathering process as follow:

*It is our task to collect information and convert them to social media contents. We collect the information from the field...We receive information through phone calls and email and change them to social media contents. Sometimes, we send the AV people to participate in distributions. We then compile the information and upload them to the already mentioned social media outlets.*

As indicated in the above response, there are two sources of potential social media contents. The first one is information gathered and sent by external sources to the communication department. The second source is content obtained by colleagues of the communication department through field visits.

The respondent also further elaborated the department's effort in establishing a consistent content gathering system with concerned departments and regional branches, by using data gathering tools like standard information gathering template.

Meanwhile, the other four respondents showed their doubt on the proper implementation of this content gathering system and the permanent flow of information. Replying to the question on the presence of an established system helping to gather social media contents from other departments and regional branch offices, Respondent 3 gave the below explanation:

*No, we don't have it [the system] until now. There is a means that we sometimes get a report from the departments here [in the HQ]. In addition, there are also things coming through the head of the communication department. Other than that, we are getting information from branches and departments informally and with our effort. We don't have an established system...we are getting information informally and in an unorganized way.*

The respondents are hopeful of the recently established line of information gathering system with representatives of the regional branches, following the training organized by the communication department and partners of the ERCS. As indicated in the responses, a training program was conducted on the last week of March 2021 to create an understanding of the proper use of social media platforms.

Respondent 4 further stated that participants of the training were assigned as focal persons to their respective branches in order to establish a formal line of communication. And this is expected to resolve the challenges of receiving information in a timely and conventional manner.

#### **4.2.2. The Driving Factors to Adopt Social Media as a PR Tool by the ERCS**

Each respondent reflected his/her understanding of the factors that pushed the ERCS to use social media as a PR tool. Respondent 1 listed that the drives for using social media emanate from directions of the top-level management, assessment results pointing towards modernizing the image building and visibility activities of the Society and social media policies and directives put in place by components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Respondent 2 stated that the ERCS conduct several activities, but these activities are not visible to the wider public. The respondent reasons social media technology can reach many people, both locally and internationally. Therefore, social media is adopted as a tool to benefit from the visibility advantage of the platforms.

Respondent 3 listed three possible reasons for using social media by the ERCS. First, it is not possible to address all publics of the organization using the traditional media/mainstream media. Therefore, according to the respondent social media can help in reaching a significant number of their publics.

Second, social media gives the advantage of getting feedback through comments, direct inbox messages or various other ways. Third, many people now have access to social media. This provides the chance to address diverse people in different age groups. For this respondent, social

media give the opportunity of understanding the awareness and expectations of a diverse group of people towards the organization.

According to the personal observation of Respondent 4, the acceptance and use of social media channels are increasing. It can be easily accessed; it is interactive, enabling two-way communication and provides immediate feedback. The respondent trust that it is not easy to ignore such advantages of social media.

Respondent 5 assumes that the drives for using social media as a PR tool are its influence and easy access. The respondent underlined the existing influences of social media, and it is the understanding of these influences that brought the ERCS's social media involvement.

According to all respondents, an additional drive for using social media as a PR tool is its compatibility with other PR and communication tools. All respondents agreed that it is possible to simultaneously run both social media and other public relations tools of the organization. For instance, Respondent 1 mentioned their experience of sharing the soft copy of printed materials to reach a wider audience.

Other examples by Respondents 2, 3 and 4 indicated that advertisements used in the mainstream media like television and radio are also published on the social media outlets of the Society. Respondent 5 also claimed that there are occasions in which social media messages addressing donation requests have helped the resource mobilization campaigns of the ERCS.

Generally, from the above responses, the drives for using social media as a communications tool by the ERCS can be summarized as management directions, its compatibility with other PR and communication tools, and to take advantage of the benefits of social media platforms such as visibility, feedback management, reachability and growing acceptance/influence.

All the respondents agree that social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are selected due to their large number of users in Ethiopia. They are also assumed to host the majority

of the ERCS's target public. Respondents 1 and 2 also added that experiences learned from other sister Societies like the Kenyan Red Cross directed them to select the platforms.

Respondent 3 mentioned additional reasons for using the three platforms. Those are experts' relative skill and previous experience in managing Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages compared to several other platforms.

As mentioned by the respondents, the target publics intended to reach through these social media platforms are the wider community, sister Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and movement partners, government institutions, donors, volunteers and the media houses. Here, Respondents 1 and 5 accepted the presence of a gap in further identifying potential social media publics. They believe that identifying their social media public will help them to fine-tune the messages conveyed through the platforms.

As presented earlier, one of the drivers of using social media as a PR tool is previous experience of other Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Requesting further clarification, the researcher asked expert respondents about their experience of monitoring the social media activities of other humanitarian organizations.

All expert respondents confirmed that they do follow the social media activities of other humanitarian organizations. They mentioned organizations like the ICRC, IFRC, UNICEF and IOM. The motives stated by all the respondents for following the social media outlets of these organizations are to learn from their experience as they are working in a similar humanitarian sector and to get frequent updates from these pages.

#### **4.2.3. Messages Conveyed through the ERCS's Social Media Outlets**

To answer this research question, the researcher asked respondents about the characteristics of general messages and messages related to COVID-19 and donation requests. The researcher also collected a total of fifty-two (52) COVID-19 and donation request messages published on the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube outlets from March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021.

The researcher believes that data collected from respondents as well as the social media pages support each other. Therefore, they will be presented side by side in the following discussion.

While explaining the nature of the general messages, the respondents indicated that most of the messages published on the social media pages of the ERCS are about the organization's humanitarian services delivered through its disaster response and development project activities.

The disaster response activities include the Society's emergency aid and humanitarian services to people affected by natural and human-made calamities. The development activities constitute the provision and strengthening of basic social services like health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

Similarly, the respondents said that the contents they publish also include corporate events and ceremonial programs. Furthermore, Respondent 3 mentioned that they prepare specific messages addressing separate target audiences. A good example discussed by the respondent is social media messages addressing the mainstream media institutions for their respective news coverage.

The responses show that most of the social media contents are prepared in a news format. In agreement with this, Respondent 4 stated that *“the contents are usually in a news format, and we very rarely have feature stories. We never used exclusive interviews for social media unless it is for newsletters or magazines, during my presence here.”*

The expert respondents indicated that the social media contents are prepared in text, picture, short video and graphics formats. The experts affirmed that they mostly use a combination of text and picture/photograph contents for Facebook and Twitter. Respondents 3 and 5 explained two important reasons for frequently using a combination of text and picture/photograph contents on Facebook and Twitter.

According to Respondent 3, in social media, a pictorial presentation can help to show the reality on the ground, and it can help to easily convince their publics. The respondent said:

*Rather than using text alone, when using messages with pictures – people take it as a piece of evidence, and it helps to show the reality on the ground...Rather than writing a page full of words, you can convey a lot of messages if you attach a picture with a short caption. As I observed, those with photographs and video have more acceptance, and their reliability is very high.*

For Respondent 5, they usually stick to using the combination of text and picture contents because getting viewers for video posts is minimal. The respondent assumes that their video posts get very limited viewers due to the internet connection problem and the cost of the internet to open online videos. The respondent also added that posts with website links also perform better, and they even help to increase traffic to the official website.

Amharic and English are the two languages used for conveying social media messages. The explanation of expert respondents shows that Amharic is the most frequently used language to address the local public of the organization. The English language is additionally used for the purpose of reaching the ERCS's international public, like movement and non-movement partners, and potential donors.

As mentioned earlier, responding to national health emergencies and resource/humanitarian assistance mobilization are among the major duties of the ERCS. The following discussion gives a specific focus on the ERCS's social media messages related to COVID-19 and donation requests.

According to respondents, the ERCS has started responding against COVID-19 since the first announcement of the prevalence of the pandemic in Ethiopia. And social media outlets were among the tools that served to communicate thematic messages.

The data collected from the ERCS's social media channels indicated that Facebook was the most frequently used channel to communicate messages about COVID-19, followed by the YouTube Channel. There is no message conveyed about COVID-19 via the Twitter account.

A combination of text and Picture/photograph contents are predominantly used on Facebook. There are also other posts with text and graphics, text and video, text and website hyperlink and text alone. Due to the nature of the platform, all COVID-19 related contents uploaded on the YouTube

channel are video contents. And the contents are predominantly short videos with a duration of less than two (2) minutes.

Two issues dominate COVID-19 related messages published on the Facebook and YouTube outlets of the ERCS. The first one is an awareness-raising message on the preventive measures of COVID-19. The other is news reports on ERCS's wide-ranging activities against COVID-19 through interventions like door to door awareness raising, community sensitization, hand washing and sanitizer use campaigns and protective items donations.

Most of the COVID-19 preventive messages and activity report videos uploaded on YouTube are produced in collaboration with famous artists and sports personalities. Respondent 2 believe that these videos were very well accepted by their YouTube followers. The respondent elaborated that people were quickly responding to videos showing the celebrities' COVID-19 preventive messages and their activities in the community sensitization campaigns.

The respondents further provided information regarding the issues mostly covered by the ERCS's social media outlet. The remark from Respondent 3 summarizes their comments. The respondent said:

*Most of the messages are related to protection methods of COVID-19, about sanitization, mask use, social distancing and similar other types of messages. Furthermore, events were also presented. Informative message about the Society's activities concerning its COVID-19 response that people need to know. It can be feeding program, support or distribution – messages on the list of activities in which the public need to know and which can build the organization's image and popularity among the public.*

The other COVID-19 related messages covered by Facebook posts and YouTube videos are news coverages by other mainstream media houses about ERCS's preventive activities and donations supporting the preventive activities of other regional institutions. One of the respondents mentioned that they have also published COVID-19 preventive advertisements, which were released via local television and radio channels.

The data from the ERCS's Facebook and YouTube accounts indicate that COVID-19 related contents are principally prepared in the Amharic language. There are also limited messages

published in English, a combination of English and Amharic, Afariga and Somaliga languages. The Afariga and Somaliga contents are television advertisements that are published on the ERCS's YouTube channel.

Besides uploading video contents, the YouTube platform has an additional function to include a description as a synopsis about the content uploaded. Regarding these descriptions, almost all COVID-19 related video contents were uploaded without a detailed description about the messages of the videos.

Due to the nature of the platform itself, all video contents on YouTube were directly uploaded by the channel administrator. Whereas, the Facebook platform gives the chance of both publishing original contents and sharing information published by other users of the platform. According to the data from the two sources, the majority of the COVID-19 related messages conveyed via Facebook were original contents.

There is also a considerable number of contents shared from Facebook accounts of selected regional media institutions and humanitarian partners of the ERCS. Contents from the media institutions address the donation of preventive items by the ERCS to different regional health institutions. Contents from humanitarian partners, on the other hand, show collaborative/partnership activities in preventing the COVID-19 pandemic.

In general, data gathered from both interviewees and the social media accounts indicate that the ERCS has used social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter to communicate COVID-19 related messages. These messages have different forms, and most of them are published to convey preventive messages against COVID-19. There are also a couple of messages reporting COVID-19 related activities conducted by the Society.

The other interest to this research work is understanding how the ERCS is communicating donation related messages. Contrary to COVID-19 related messages, the ERCS has used the three corporate social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) to communicate about donation related issues.



According to the data from the social media platforms of the ERCS, most of the donation related messages published on Facebook and YouTube platforms are direct financial and in-kind donation requests. The activities appealed for donation by the ERCS include reaching people economically affected by COVID-19, assisting communities that lost their harvest due to locust invasion and further improve the ERCS's activities of supporting people around the country who are affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Meanwhile, all the messages published on the Twitter account of the ERCS are activity reports in a news format. These Twitter contents largely highlight the Society's virtual and face-to-face press conferences about its donation appeals.

The data from the Facebook and YouTube platforms indicated that all donation requests published on the ERCS's Facebook page constitute detailed information about where to donate, how to donate, and what donations are required. Whereas all donation request videos uploaded on YouTube does not specify where to donate and how to donate. In addition, all the videos didn't constitute additional descriptions about the messages or contents of the videos.

The data from the social media accounts also indicated that contents with text and pictures/photographs are frequently used on Facebook and Twitter platforms. No video content related to donation requests was used on both Facebook and Twitter. On the other hand, short video contents ranging from 1:10 to 2:26 minutes were uploaded on the ERCS's YouTube channel.

Text prepared in graphics artworks is among the contents used on Facebook. The expert respondents also confirmed this information. The Respondents stated that they published radio advertisement scripts on Facebook by preparing the text in a one-page graphics format.

Contents with text and website links were also published to redirect the readers to the ERCS's official website for further reading on the stories. The stories are mostly covering donations received by the ERCS from different local associations and activities conducted using the donations.

The donation related contents published on Facebook and YouTube are largely prepared in the Amharic language. Whereas the contents for Twitter are solely prepared in the English language. The expert respondents justified that the ERCS's donation requests and fundraising campaigns largely target the local public. Therefore, the Amharic language is assumed to address the majority of their target public to this activity.

Furthermore, the experts argued that most of the international donors and partners of the ERCS are using Twitter, and it is appropriate to address them in the English language. It is worth noting again that all the donation related contents tweeted during the selected time frame report activities of the ERCS in a news format.

According to the data collected from the three social media accounts of the ERCS, almost all donation request related contents are original contents prepared and published/uploaded on these platforms.

All the respondents strongly believe that donation requests and activity reports related to donation have significantly supported the ERCS's fundraising campaigns and resource mobilization activities. For example, Respondents 1 and 5 explained that social media has helped in further popularizing public support campaigns run using other PR and communication tools like advertisements, press conferences and press releases. Both respondents mentioned testimonies of people, who visited their office as one of the success indicators for this social media activity.

#### **4.2.3.1. Availability of Basic Information on the Social Media Profiles of the ERCS**

Profile information of any social media page or account provides a basic description of the owner of the page or account. It can help in shaping the first impression of a new visitor and a reminder to the returning ones. The researcher investigated the availability of basic information on the profiles of the ERCS's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms.

For this purpose, the researcher borrowed and amended one of the themes, called organizational disclosure, developed by Waters et al. (2009). These scholars used the themes for their study on the use of Facebook by nonprofit organizations.

According to Walters et al. (2009), organizational disclosure is adopted to determine whether basic information about the organization is presented in the profiles of the social media pages. These include a description of the organization’s programs and services, mission statement, organization’s website, other contact addresses and its logo.

Table 1, hereunder summarizes and presents the availability of basic information on the social media profiles of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube using the theme of organizational disclosure. The adjacent cell under each platform is marked as ‘YES’ if the information is available on the profile and ‘NO’ if the information is missing.

**Table 1. Availability of basic information on the social media profiles of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.**

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube
<b>Organizational Disclosure</b>			
Description of the organization’s programs and services	YES	NO	NO
Mission statement	YES	YES	NO
Organization’s Website	YES	YES	YES
Other contact address	YES	YES	NO
Organization’s logo	YES	YES	YES

Source: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube outlets of the ERCS.

As shown in Table 1, the Facebook profile provides all the basic information about the organization’s programs and services, mission statement, website, other contact address and the organization’s logo. Whereas the Twitter profile briefly offers other information (mission statement, the organization’s website, other contact addresses and the organization’s logo) except the description of the organization’s programs and services. The information on the YouTube profile, on the other hand, is only limited to presenting the organization’s website and logo. The researcher believes that the profile information is not complete due lack of attention in completing the profiles.

#### **4.2.4. Opportunities and Challenges of Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS**

In the following sub-sections, responses to the opportunities and challenges of using social media as a PR tool, in the context of the ERCS, will be presented. One of the following sub-sections also presents responses on the practicality/relevance of Affordance Theory to the ERCS's use of social media, with a specific focus on the four selected affordances of social media.

##### **4.2.4.1. Opportunities for Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS**

Here, the researcher tried to understand the opportunities of using social media as a PR tool in the context of the ERCS. All the respondents agreed on the potential opportunities of using social media as a PR tool. For instance, Respondent 1 claimed that social media use provided the opportunity of reaching different parts of society including the mainstream media. The respondent believes that this is further facilitated by the presence of Wi-Fi and mobile phone technologies.

Respondent 2 similarly agreed with the above claim and added that the Society's social media use helped in receiving both constrictive feedbacks and criticisms about its activities. For the respondent, social media has also helped to increase/raise the number of registered members of the Society.

Respondent 3 stressed the communication advantage of social media and underlined its role as a two-way communication channel. The respondent said that

*We don't know what the image of the people is [towards the organization] while we are not using social media. PR activity would be difficult if you don't know that. You might be doing something, whereas the public is expecting something else. Therefore, its ability to easily practice two-way communication, I think, is one of the first and vital opportunities.*

Respondent 4 acknowledged that the ERCS can get many followers with a small effort in order to reach many social media users online. The respondent also showed a reservation on the proper exploitation of this opportunity by the ERCS.

For Respondent 5, social media use has helped them to address communication crises. The respondent mentioned the department's previous experience in successfully addressing

communication crises through releasing statements via the Society's social media channels. The respondent asserted that such social media actions helped the organization to effectively and timely reach the mainstream media and the wider public.

The same respondent also explained the resource mobilization and campaign management advantages of social media. Respondent 5 affirmed that their social media outlets are assisting the income generation efforts of the Society. In addition, campaigns like restoring the family links of separated people were managed by social media. One of their recent experience mentioned by the respondent was their phone call service campaign run through social media outlets to bring together family members separated due to the conflict in the Tigray region.

The researcher also wanted to further evaluate the practical applicability of affordance theory in the ERCS's social media use. The researcher elaborated the characteristics of affordances of Visibility, Persistence, Editability and Association to the four expert respondents and asked them if these affordances are practically applied in their social media activities.

All four expert respondents confirmed that the ERCS is taking advantage of social media affordances of Visibility, Persistence, Editability and Association. The respondents also mentioned some examples supporting their claim.

For example, Respondent 5 explained the social media affordance of Visibility in the context of the ERCS with his words as follow: *“When we see the last six months report, it indicated that all our social media accounts have reached about three hundred thousand people...This means that the activities have been viewed by three hundred thousand people. Therefore, it has improved the visibility.”*

The respondents also gave a highlight on the practicality of the social media affordance of Persistence. According to them, information posted on social media channels of the ERCS is accessed by their audience for a long period of time. Adding to this, one of the respondents said that the social media channels are also serving as an archive or reference when they want to refer to their previous activities.

The Editability affordance of social media identified by the respondents shows that experts in the ERCS use the platforms to prepare and publish original posts. Furthermore, the experts use the platforms to correct, update, modify or remove the already published contents like texts, figures, pictures and videos.

While discussing social media affordance of Association, the respondents indicated that social media platforms allowed them to connect with fellow Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, other components of the movement and their partners. It also enabled them to interact with the published social media stories of these organizations.

#### **4.2.4.2. The Challenges of Using Social Media as a PR Tool in the ERCS**

The researcher asked the respondents about their challenges while using social media as a PR tool. The most frequently mentioned challenge by the respondents is the lack of technical capacity and know-how in properly managing social media platforms. All expert respondents admitted the presence of this skill gap. Their replies indicated that experts managing the social media outlets of the ERCS are not intensively using the available tools and lack advanced skills to operate on the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms.

Another frequently mentioned challenge is the lack of equipment. The respondents indicated a lack of high-speed laptop computers and audio-visual materials for information gathering and social media content preparation. The experts also explained that their laptop computers are not suitable for their use, and they are very slow for administering or monitoring social media platforms.

The rest of the challenges mentioned by the respondents include limited support, lack of focus and biased assumption about social media in particular and the communication team in general from the management side, lack of commitment in considering social media as a permanent assignment, limited human power, employee turnover, slow internet connection speed, limited information due to lack of formal information exchange structure, limited provision of capacity building training programs and delayed validation process of draft social media contents.

The researcher asked the respondents about their recommendations for the better use of social media as a PR tool in their context. The respondents are optimistic that the social media outlets of the ERCS can further support its PR activities if the above-discussed challenges and gaps are addressed by all concerned at the top-level management or within the communication department.

## **Chapter Five**

### **5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

In this section, based on the analysis of the study, a summary of findings and conclusions are drawn, and some possible recommendations are forwarded. As indicated in chapter one, the purpose of this study is to investigate the use of social media as a PR tool with a specific focus on the ERCS.

#### **5.1. Summary of Findings**

In the attempt to answer the research questions, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview and gathered data from the head of the ERCS's communication department and experts running the social media channels of the society. To understand the nature of messages conveyed via ERCS's social media outlets, the researcher gathered fifty-two (52) social media contents published between March 1, 2020 and March 1, 2021, which are addressing messages related to COVID-19 and donation requests.

Accordingly, the researcher found out that the ERCS's communication department has adopted social media as part of its PR and communication strategy. These are visible through its active involvement in purposively selected social media platforms. But the respondents showed differences in the level of acceptance and endorsement of social media among the top-level management. Both sides of the respondents presented pieces of evidence to support their arguments. From the evidence, the researcher found that the top-level level management has recognized the role of social media as a PR tool but, its support to the social media activities is limited.

The information gathered indicated that the ERCS's communication department has prepared a social media guideline, with a desire to strategically lead social media activities of the ERCS at the headquarter and regional branch levels.

Among other platforms, the ERCS has mainly selected Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms as its main social media outlets. The key justifications provided for selecting these platforms are



the availability of a significant number of target audience hosted in these platforms, experiences learned from other sister Red Cross Societies and experts' skill and previous exposure in managing these platforms than others.

Concerning the regularity of updates on the ERCS's social media platforms, evidence from expert respondents indicated that Facebook posts/Tweets/YouTube uploads are highly dependent on the availability of events or activities. And the social media updates are not scheduled ahead of time.

A major step in measuring social media is to define one's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Jeffrey, 2013). KIPs are tracked data related to a company's presence on individual platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, or across all social platforms collectively (Olafson, 2021).

The researcher identified disparities among respondents in understanding social media KPIs. Though expert respondents indicated that they have limited knowledge about the concept of KPIs, the majority of them were able to mention at least one potential social media KPI while elaborating their social media reporting process.

Regarding the reporting process of social media activities, the researcher learned that social media activities of the ERCS are reported monthly, quarterly and annually. But the results indicated that the social media management or other social media-related activities of the experts are not individually evaluated. Rather, they are assessed and marked as a team.

The communication department has two sources of social media contents. These are external sources, like regional branches and other departments and internal sources, that are the experts in the department. The results indicated the lack of a formal information gathering system, causing a shortage of potential social media contents.

While trying to answer the second research question, which is identifying the drives for using social media as a PR tool by the ERCS, the researcher identified a list of reasons. Among the major ones are directions from the ERCS's management, its recognition in the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Movement, and to benefit from the visibility, feedback management and accessibility advantages of social media.

According to the information gathered from the respondents, the other drive for using social media as a PR tool is its compatibility with other PR and communication tools. Some of the practical experiences mentioned by the respondents indicated that the ERCS is able to use social media side by side with other PR and communication tools.

The publics targeted for social media communication by the ERCS are the wider community, sister Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and movement partners, government institutions, donors, volunteers and media institutions. Some respondents indicated that there is still a gap in further identifying the target publics.

The researcher used in-depth interview data to understand the nature of general messages conveyed through the social media outlets of the ERCS. The respondents indicated that most of the messages are about ERCS's disaster response and development project activities. There also specific messages addressing a selected target public like the media.

The responses indicate that most of the social media stories on Facebook and Twitter are prepared in a news format using a combination of text and picture/photograph contents. The reasons mentioned for frequently using these kinds of contents are to increase the reliability and acceptance of the messages.

Amharic and English are the two languages applied for conveying general social media messages. The Amharic language is used for addressing the local public of the Society. Whereas the English language used for addressing ERCS's international public.

Besides the general messages, both in-depth interviews and social media data are used in further understanding the nature of thematic social media messages of the ERCS. For this purpose, the issues of COVID-19 and donation requests were selected and analyzed by the researcher. The data

from these two sources support each other, and they were simultaneously presented in the previous chapter.

The data collected from the ERCS's social media channels show that Facebook and YouTube outlets were used for conveying messages about COVID-19, and no message about the same issue was released via the Twitter account.

Like the general messages, COVID-19 related messages on Facebook were predominantly prepared using the combination of text and picture/photograph contents. Almost all the video contents uploaded on the YouTube channel are short videos with a duration of less than two (2) minutes.

Awareness-raising preventive messages and news reports on the ERCS's activities dominate the COVID-19 related contents published on the Facebook page and YouTube channel of the society during the selected time frame.

COVID-19 preventive message and activity report videos (about community sensitization) uploaded on YouTube were produced using renowned art and sports personalities as an ambassador. According to the data from the respondents, these video messages were very well accepted among their followers and the wider community. The researcher found that this activity can be a good example showing how the social media tool can support other PR tools.

The data gathered from both sources also indicate that the other COVID-19 related messages shared through Facebook and YouTube include news coverages on the mainstream media and television and radio advertisements.

The Amharic language was dominantly used for preparing COVID-19 related messages. There are also messages published in English and a combination of English and Amharic languages. Different from other general or thematic contents published in other social media outlets of the ERCS, Afariga and Somaliga languages were used on the YouTube channel for very limited occasions.

The researcher learned from the data obtained from the platforms that almost all COVID-19 related YouTube videos uploaded on the Society's channel are without descriptions of the videos. Due to this, the ERCS misses the chance of conveying further information about the issues presented in the videos.

All COVID-19 related YouTube videos are directly uploaded by the channel administrator. On the other hand, COVID-19 related messages on the Facebook page are both original contents and stories shared by other Facebook users like the media and humanitarian partners of the Society. And most of the original messages are about the preventive measures of COVID-19 and news/reports associated with the Society's activities.

Concerning the donation request messages, the collected data from the social media pages and the respondents indicated that the ERCS used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube channels to communicate about this issue.

The data also shows that most of the messages published via Facebook and YouTube platforms during the selected time frame are direct financial and in-kind donation requests to reach people affected by COVID-19, locust invasion, conflict and natural disasters. Meanwhile, all the messages published on the Twitter account are news reports about the ERCS's virtual and face-to-face press conferences.

All donation request messages published on the ERCS's Facebook page includes detailed information about the kind of donation required and how to donate. But the same messages uploaded on the YouTube channel lacks this information. Furthermore, all the videos are uploaded without additional descriptions about the messages of the videos.

Similar to the general and COVID-19 related messages, contents with text and pictures/photographs were regularly used on Facebook and Twitter platforms of the organization in order to communicate about donation requests. No video content was used on Facebook and Twitter to communicate donation requests. Whereas, short video contents ranging from 1:10 to 2:26 minutes were used on the ERCS's YouTube channel to communicate about the same issue.

Both sources of data also indicated that text scripts of advertisements prepared in graphics are additionally used. Furthermore, text accompanied by hyperlinks to stories that are published on the ERCS's website are also used for addressing donation related activities. Guo and Saxton (2013) indicated in their work that hyperlinks play a key role in microblogging services like Twitter. They added that by including external link, organizations can share longer textual passages, as well as photos and videos, with their user community.

The donation related messages published on Facebook and YouTube are largely in Amharic. The justification provided by respondents indicated that this is to address local publics targeted by different fundraising campaigns. In the meantime, all donation related tweets published on the Twitter account of the ERCS during the selected time are solely prepared in the English language and they are reporting activities of the Society in a news format.

All the respondents strongly indicated that donation requests and activity reports related to donation have significantly supported the Society's fundraising campaigns and resource mobilization activities. Though there is no technical assessment put in place to measure social medias' success in this regard, respondents mentioned testimonies of people who visited their office as one of the success indicators for this social media activity.

The researcher adopted the organizational disclosure theme developed by Walters et al. (2009) and found out that the Facebook profile of the ERCS provides all the necessary information to visitors of the page. The Twitter account, on the other hand, has information about the Society but lacks giving details about the organization's programs and services. The YouTube profile is only limited to presenting the ERCS's website and logo.

Curtis et al. (2009) stated that public relations practitioners are more likely to use social media tools if they find them credible. They added that social media techniques will become more abundant as public relations practitioners become mindful of their effectiveness in reaching target audiences, promoting a specific cause, and further developing communication strategies.

In the attempt to understand the opportunities of using social media as a PR tool in the ERCS, the researcher learned that all respondents of this work can identify the opportunities of using social media as a PR tool. The respondents indicated that the ERCS has gained a list of opportunities by using social media as a PR tool.

Some of these opportunities are timely reaching publics of the Society, effectively reaching particular publics like the media, publicizing organizational activities, creating two-way communication channels to get feedback from their publics, addressing communication crises and supporting other operations like fundraising campaigns running through other PR and communication tools.

In their research among seventy-five (75) transnational NGOs based in the United States, Seo et al. (2009) also identified similar results. Their work indicates that for NGOs, which generally operate under a tight budget, their online public relations are geared toward enhancing the organization's image and tapping into current and potential sources of funding.

Furthermore, the results of this research work indicated that social media affordances of Visibility, Persistence, Editability and Association are practically viable to the social media activities of the ERCS. The evidence forwarded by expert respondents strongly supports this argument.

Mullaney (2012) concluded that the basic barriers preventing full use of social media in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries, are the lack of technological infrastructure, capacity and resources. The findings indicate that the same hindrances are experienced by the ERCS while using social media as a PR tool.

Lack of technical capacity to fully exploit social media platforms, limited availability of equipment, limited attention and support from the management, lack of commitment, limited human resources, employee turnover, insufficient capacity building training programs, slow internet connection speed and lack of formal line of communication with the information providers are among the major challenges identified by this research.

## 5.2. Conclusion

This research work aimed to study the application of social media as a PR tool among humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia, with a specific focus on the ERCS. Based on the results that are presented in the previous sub-section, the researcher concluded the following points:

- From the results, the researcher concluded that social media is recognized and adopted as a PR tool by the ERCS, and the communication department is actively using the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to communicate its messages.
- From the results, it can be concluded that the major drives for adopting social media as a PR tool by the ERCS are directions from the management, its recognition in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its compatibility with other PR tools and to benefit from its visibility, feedback management and accessibility advantages.
- The results indicate that the ERCS is using social media to convey general and thematic messages like COVID-19 and donation requests. These messages are mainly prepared in Amharic and English languages by predominantly using the combination of text and picture/photograph contents.
- It can be concluded from the results that by using social media as a PR tool, the ERCS is able to reach its publics, publicized its activities, easily get feedback from its publics, timely addressed communication crises and strengthened its fundraising campaigns. The study also verified that the social media affordances of Visibility, Persistence, Editability, and Association are practically viable to the social media activities of the ERCS. Similarly, this study concluded that the ERCS is not optimally using social media due to the major challenges of lack of technical capacity, limited availability of equipment, insufficient support from the top-level management, limited capacity building training programs, slow internet connection, and lack of formal social media content gathering system.

### 5.3. Recommendations

As indicated in the findings of this work, social media can have a pivotal role as one of the PR tools. Therefore, the researcher offers the following recommendations for the optimal use of social media platforms as a PR tool in the context of the ERCS.

- Social media activities of the ERCS requires full endorsement and strategic guidance from the top-level management of the organization.
- Capacity building must be a priority. Social media activities of experts must be supported with technical training programs, creating awareness in the use of social media tools, planning and setting of KPIs.
- Rather than largely depending on event-related messages and news updates, the communication department needs to consider other types of engaging social media contents like individual stories of beneficiaries, using a call to action message, marking national and international dates relevant to the activities of the Society (World Red Cross day, World Health Day, World Humanitarian Day, etc.) and using entertaining and humanistic contents (like Monday motivation, weekend plan, etc.).
- While preparing contents, it is advisable to use both Amharic and English languages simultaneously rather than solely preparing them in one of the two. It is also advisable to experiment using other local languages for selected priority messages.
- Social media activities of the ERCS should be included in the individual appraisal. This will help to improve the motivation and commitment of experts.
- Social media outlets of the organization should be used proportionally, and specific contents must be inter-shared among the platforms. It is also advisable to use paid social media advertisements alongside organic activities.
- The researcher also recommends other researchers to study the ERCS's social media activities from the publics' perspective and how other humanitarian organizations operating in Ethiopia are using social media as a PR tool.



## References

- Ameyu, E. (2015). *Social media and Journalism: Journalists and media outlets' use of social media networks in Ethiopia*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Austin, L., Liu, B.F., and Jin, Y. (2012). "How Audiences Seek Out Crisis Information: Exploring the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model." *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 40, Issue 2, pp.188-207. DOI: 10.1080/00909882.2012.654498.
- Bennett, W. L., and Segerberg, A. (2012). "The Logic of Connective Action." *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 15, Issue 5, pp. 739-768. DOI:10.1080/1369118x.2012.670661.
- Bitima M. (2019). *The perceived impact of social media on mainstream Journalism practices: The case of Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation and Fana Broadcasting Corporate*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Blewett, C., and Hugo, W. (2016). "Actant affordances: a brief history of affordance theory and a Latourian extension for education technology research." *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 55-73. DOI: 10.14426/cristal.v4i1.50.
- Boyd, D. (2010). "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications." In Zizi Papacharissi (ed.). *In Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, pp. 39-58.
- Brounéus, K. (2011). "In-depth Interviewing: The process, skill and ethics of interviews in peace research." In Høglund, K. and Oberg, M. (eds). *Understanding Peace Research Methods and Challenges* (1<sup>st</sup> Edition), pp. 130 – 145.
- Cropley, A. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: A practice-oriented introduction for students of psychology and education* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Riga, Latvia: Zinātne. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.3095.6888.
- Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., and Sweetser, K. D. (2010). "Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations." *Public Relations Review*, Vol.36, Issue 1, pp.90-92. DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.003.
- Daniel, B. (2019). *Social media as a Government Communication tool: The case of Addis Ababa City Government Mayor's Office*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

- Davis, J. L., and Chouinard, J. B. (2017). “Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse.” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, Vol.00, Issue 00, pp.1–8. DOI: 10.1177/0270467617714944.
- Dawit, G. (2020). *Practices and Challenges of Public Relations in Non-For-Profit Organizations: The Case of Ethiopian Red Cross Society*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Dawit, W. (2019). *Challenges of Using Social Media Among PR Practitioners: The Case of Federal Government Organizations in Addis Ababa*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- D’Exelle, B. (2014). “Representative Sample.” In Michalos, A. C. (ed). *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. DOI:10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5\_2476.
- Di Gangi, P. M., and Wasko, M. M. (2016). “Social Media Engagement Theory: Exploring the Influence of User Engagement on Social Media Usage.” *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (JOEUC)*, Vol. 28, Issue 2, pp. 53-73.
- Drahošová, M., and Balco, B. (2017). “The analysis of advantages and disadvantages of use of social media in European Union.” *The 7th International Symposium on Frontiers in Ambient and Mobile Systems (FAMS 2017). Procedia Computer Science 109C*. pp. 1005–1009. DOI: 10.1016/j.procs.2017.05.446.
- Elias, M. D. (2020). “Evaluating the Programs and Procedures of Project Planning and Management: The Case of Ethiopia Red Cross Society.” *International Journal of World Policy and Development Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue. 7, pp. 97-104. DOI :10.32861/ijwpds.67.97.104.
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Tarja Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., and Kyngäs, H. (2014). “Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness.” *SAGE Open*, pp.1-10. DOI: 10.1177/2158244014522633.
- Eskedar B. (2017). *Determinants of Effectiveness of Social Media usage: The case of Ethiopian Airlines*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Commerce, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Etenesh N. (2019). *An Assessment on The Role of Social Media in Public Relations: A Case Of Facebook Page In Mekelle City Tigray Public Relations Bureau*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Ethiopian Red Cross Society. (2015). *Strategic Plan July 2015 - June 2020*.

- Ethiopian Red Cross Society. (2019). *Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025*.
- Federal Negarit Gazette of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Proclamation No.1067/2018. *Ethiopian Red Cross Society Re-establishment Charter Proclamation*.
- Federal Negarit Gazette of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Proclamation No. 1185/2020. *Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation*.
- Feyisa, M., and Dawit, A. G. (2018). “Perceived Benefits and Risks of Social Media: Ethiopian Secondary School Students’ Perspectives.” *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, Vol. 3, pp. 294-300. DOI: 10.1007/s41347-018-0062-6.
- Foreman, C. (2017). *10 Types of Social Media and How Each Can Benefit Your Business*. <https://blog.hootsuite.com/types-of-social-media/> (retrieved January 1, 2021).
- Fraustino, J. D., B.F. Liu, and Y. Jin. (2012). *Social media use during disasters: a review of the knowledge base and gaps*. Final Report to Human Factors/Behavioral Sciences Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), College Park, MD.
- Freberg, K., Palenchar, M. J., and Veil, S. R. (2013). “Managing and Sharing H1N1 Crisis Information Using Social Media Bookmarking Services.” *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, pp. 178-184. DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.02.007.
- George, D. R., Rovniak, L. S., and Kraschnewski, J. L. (2013). “Dangers and Opportunities for Social Media in Medicine.” *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Vol. 56, Issue 3, pp. 453-462. DOI:10.1097/grf.0b013e318297dc38
- Grey, D. E. (2014). *Doing Research in Real World* (3rd ed). Sage Publications. Available at <https://docplayer.net/8897779-Third-edition-doing-research-in-the-real-world-david-e-gray.html> (Retrieved July 12, 2021).
- Gulerman, N. I., and Apaydin, F. (2017). “Effectiveness of Digital Public Relations Tools on Various Customer Segments.” *Journal of Management, Marketing and Logistics (JMML)*, Vol. 4, Issue. 3, pp. 259-270. DOI: 10.17261/Pressacademia.2017.488.
- Guo, C., and Saxton, G. D. (2013). “Tweeting Social Change.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 43, Issue 1, pp. 57-79. DOI:10.1177/0899764012471585.
- Hafezieh, N., and Eshraghian, F. (2017). “Affordance Theory in Social Media Research: Systematic Review and Synthesis of the Literature.” *Twenty-Fifth European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS), Guimarães, Portugal*.

- Houston, J. B., Hawthorne, J., Perreault, M. F., Park, E. H., Goldstein Hode, M., Halliwell, M. R., and Griffith, S. A. (2014). “Social media and disasters: a functional framework for social media use in disaster planning, response, and research.” *Disasters*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, pp. 1-22. DOI:10.1111/disa.12092.
- Hsieh, H. F. and Shannon, E. S. (2005). “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.” *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 15 No. 9, November 2005 1277-1288. DOI: 10.1177/1049732305276687.
- International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2007). *The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement at a glance*. PDF accessed on January 10, 2021. Available at: [https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/at\\_a\\_glance-en.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/at_a_glance-en.pdf)
- International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2015). *The Fundamental Principles of The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Ethics and Tools for Humanitarian Action*. PDF accessed on January 10, 2021. Available at: <http://ifrc-media.org/interactive/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/FP-brochure-2015.pdf>
- International Telecommunication Union. (2002). *Internet from The Horn of Africa: Ethiopia Case Study*. Geneva, Switzerland.
- Jackson, R. L., Darlene K. Drummond, D. K., and Camara, S. (2007). “What Is Qualitative Research?.” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 21–28. DOI: 10.1080/17459430701617879.
- Kibret K. (2019). *Public relation professionals use and management of social media at federal Ministries in Ethiopia: Comparative analysis of Ministry of health and Ministry of culture and Tourism*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Kivunja, C. (2018). “Distinguishing between Theory, Theoretical Framework, and Conceptual Framework: A Systematic Review of Lessons from the Field.” *International Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 7, No. 6. DOI:10.5430/ijhe.v7n6p44.
- Kondracki, N. L., Wellman, N. S., and Daniel R. A. (2002). “Content analysis: Review of methods and their applications in nutrition education.” *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Vol.34, Issue 4. DOI:10.1016/S1499-4046(06)60097-3.
- Lariscy, R. W., Avery, E. J., Sweetser, K. D., and Howes, P. (2009). “An examination of the role of online social media in journalists’ source mix.” *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 35. DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.05.008.
- Lewis, D. Comp. by Kumar, S. (2009). *Nongovernmental Organizations, Definition and History*, p. 1-6. Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg. DOI: 10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4\_3.

- Lisanu, D. D. (2020). “Review on Facebook Impact on Social Life of Ethiopia University Student.” *Information and Knowledge Management*, Vol. 10, No. 5, pp. 19-25. DOI: 10.7176/IKM/10-5-03.
- Lovejoy, K., and Saxton, G. D. (2012). “Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 17, Issue 3, pp. 337-353. DOI:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x.
- Madianou, M. (2013). “Humanitarian Campaigns in Social Media: Network Architectures and Polymedia Events.” *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 2, pp. 249-266. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2012.718558.
- Mangold, W. G., and Faulds, D. J. (2009). “Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix.” *Business Horizons*, Vol. 52. DOI: 10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002.
- Manning, J. (2014)., Definition and classes Social Media. In K. Harvey (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of social media and politics*, pp.1158-1162. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mayring, P. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution. Klagenfurt. *Social Science Open Access Repository*. Also available at <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-395173> (Retrieved March 4, 2021).
- Mckie, D., and Sriramesh, K. (2017). *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. DOI: 10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc171.
- McPherson, E. (2014). “Advocacy Organizations’ Evaluation of Social Media Information for NGO Journalism.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, pp. 124-148. DOI:10.1177/0002764214540508.
- Meseret. A. A. (2020). “Role of Social Media in Ethiopia's Recent Political Transition.” *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*. Vol. 12, Issue 2, pp. 13-22, DOI: 10.5897/JMCS2020.0695.
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). “Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects.” *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, Vol.7, Issue 01, pp. 23-48. Available at <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/85654/> (Retrieved March 4, 2021).
- Moreno, M. A., and Koff, R. (2016). “Media Theories and the Facebook Influence Model.” *The Psychology of Social Networking*, Vol.1, pp.130-142.
- Morris, A. (2015). *A practical introduction to in-depth interviewing*. pp.1-16. SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI:10.4135/9781473921344.
- Mishra, S. B., and Alok, S. (2017). *Handbook of Research Methodology*. New Delhi. Educreation Publishing.

- Mullaney, M. J. (2012). "Optimizing Social Media in Humanitarian Crisis Responses. *The Macalester Review*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, Article 3, pp.1-25. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macreview/vol2/iss1/3> (retrieved on January 9, 2021).
- Mulugeta A. (2019). *Mapping online hate speech among Ethiopians: The Case of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Nah, S., and Saxton, G. D. (2012). "Modeling the Adoption and Use of Social Media By Nonprofit Organizations." *New Media and Society*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, pp. 294-313. DOI:10.1177/1461444812452411.
- Pan, B., and Crotts, J. (2012). Theoretical Models of Social Media, Marketing Implications, and Future Research Directions. In Sigala, M., Christou, E., and Gretzel, U. (Eds.). *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases*, pp. 73-86. Surrey, UK: Ashgate.
- Pringle, J., and Hunt, M. (2015). *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*, pp. 1-10. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-05544-2\_235-1. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht.
- Raja-Yusof, R. J., Norman, A. A., Abdul-Rahman, S.-S., Nazri, N., and Mohd-Yusoff, Z. (2016). "Cyber-volunteering: Social Media Affordances in Fulfilling NGO Social Missions." *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 57, pp. 388-397. DOI:10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.029.
- Saxena, S. (2017). *Main features of social media sites*. Available at: <https://www.easymedia.in/social-media-main-features/> (retrieved January 1, 2021).
- Schmitz, A. (2012). *Public Relations v. 1.0*. Available at: <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/pdfs/public-relations.pdf> (retrieved January 8, 2021).
- Seo, H., Kim, J. Y., and Yang, S. U. (2009). "Global activism and new media: A study of transnational NGOs' online public relations." *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 35, Issue 2, pp.123-126. DOI:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.02.002.
- Siegert, S., Caicedo, M. H., and Hansson, M. M. (2020). "Boundaryless Twitter Use: On the Affordances of Social Media." *Social Sciences*. Vol. 9, No. 201, pp.1-18. DOI :10.3390/socsci9110201.
- Sileshe, S. K. (2014). "Challenges and Opportunities of Facebook as A Media Platform in Ethiopia." *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*. Vol. 6, Issue 7, pp. 99-110, DOI: 10.5897/JMCS2014.0397.
- Sisira N. (2011). "Social media and its role in marketing." *International Journal of Enterprise Computing and Business Systems*. Vol. 1, Issue 2.

- Taprial, V., and Kanwar, P. (2012). *Understanding Social Media*. Varinder Taprial and Priya Kanwar and bookboon.com. Available at: <http://bookboon.com> (retrieved January 1, 2021).
- Tench, R. and Yeomans, L. (2009). *Exploring Public Relations* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh Gate, Harlow.
- Tesfaye, A. (2013). *Social Media as an Alternative Political Forum in Ethiopia: The Case of Facebook*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Treem, J. W., and Leonardi, P. M. (2012). “Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association.” *Communication Yearbook*, Vol. 36, pp. 143-189.
- Turano, C. T. (2017). “Social Media as a Communication Tool to Support University Student - Services: Affordances, Limitations and Opportunities for Innovations.” *International Journal of Information and Communication Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 5, pp. 75-85. DOI: 10.11648/j.ijics.20170205.14.
- Viswambharan, A. P. and Priya, K. R. (2015). “Documentary Analysis as a Qualitative Methodology to Explore Disaster Mental Health: Insights from Analyzing a Documentary on Communal Riots.” *Qualitative Research*, Vol.16, No.1. DOI: 10.1177/1468794114567494.
- Wacker, J. G. (1998). “A definition of theory: research guidelines for different theory-building research methods in operations management.” *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 16.
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., and Lucas, J. (2009). “Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook.” *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 35, Issue 2, pp. 102-106. DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006.
- Wilson, D. W., Lin, X., Longstreet, P., and Sarker, S. (2011). “Web 2.0: A Definition, Literature Review, and Directions for Future Research.” *AMCIS 2011 Proceedings - All Submissions*, pp.1-10, Paper 368. Available at: [http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2011\\_submissions/36](http://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2011_submissions/36) (retrieved January 1, 2021).
- Wubareg Y. (2019). *The use of social media as a public relations tool at Ethiopian ministry of Innovation and Technology*. Unpublished MA thesis submitted to Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Yang, J. (2017). *Enacted Affordances of Social Media and Consumers’ Response to Advertising*. Unpublished PHD dissertation in Information and Media submitted to Michigan State University.

## Internet Sources

Agency for Civil Society Organizations. <https://acso.gov.et/en/> (retrieved July 11, 2021)

Bhandari, P. (2020). *An introduction to qualitative research*.  
<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/qualitative-research/> (retrieved March 13, 2021).

British red cross. *Origins of the Red Cross Movement*. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/our-history/the-beginning-of-the-red-cross> (retrieved January 10, 2021).

Encyclopedia Britannica.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/nongovernmental-organization> (retrieved January 9, 2021).

Ethio Telecom. <https://www.ethiotelecom.et/profile/> (retrieved January 8, 2021).

Ethiopian Red Cross Society. <http://www.redcrosseth.org/> (retrieved on January 14, 2021).

Ethiopian Red Cross Society. *Image Building and Humanitarian Diplomacy Program*.  
<https://www.redcrosseth.org/what-we-do/disaster-risk-reduction-and-rehabilitation>  
(retrieved January 16, 2021).

Human Rights Careers. *What Different Types of NGOs Exist?*  
<https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/types-of-ngos/> (retrieved January 9, 2021).

International Committee of the Red Cross. *Components and Bodies of the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent*.  
<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/components-movement.htm>  
(retrieved on January 10, 2021).

International Committee of the Red Cross. <https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/movement>  
(retrieved on January 10, 2021).

Merriam-Webster Dictionary.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media?src=search-dict-hed> (retrieved January 1, 2021).

Wanyama, E. (2020). *Ethiopia's New Hate Speech and Disinformation Law Weighs Heavily on Social Media Users and Internet Intermediaries*. <https://cipesa.org/2020/07/ethiopias-new-hate-speech-and-disinformation-law-weighs-heavily-on-social-media-users-and-internet-intermediaries/> (retrieved July 11, 2021).

We are Social and Hootsuite. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ethiopia> (retrieved January 8, 2021).

[www.questionpro.com](http://www.questionpro.com) *Research Design: Definition, Characteristics and Types*.  
<https://www.questionpro.com/blog/research-design/> (retrieved March 4, 2021).

[www.research-methodology.net](http://www.research-methodology.net) *Purposive sampling*.  
<https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/purposive-sampling/>  
(retrieved March 7, 2021).



## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### **In-depth interview questions for the head of the communication department of the ERCS**

1. How long have you served in your current position?
2. Did the communication department of the ERCS recognize and adopted social media as a public relations tool?
3. Did the high-level management of the ERCS endorse social media as a public relations tool? If yes/No, what are the indications?
4. What are the drives for the ERCS to adopt social media technologies as a public relations tool?
5. Did the communication department develop social media strategy? If yes, why?
6. Why is the already in use social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are selected among other available platforms?
7. Who are your publics targeted by your social media outlets?
8. What is the nature of the messages conveyed on the ERCS's social platforms?
  - 8.1. What is the nature of messages conveyed about the following two topics?
    - COVID-19 and DONATION REQUESTS
9. Do you have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of your social media activities? If you have any, what are they?
10. Are the social media activities of your department consolidated in your weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual report?
11. Are managing and content gathering for social media platforms consolidated among the measures of the performances of the communication experts?
12. Do you have an established system that can help in gathering contents from other departments or regional branches?
13. Is it possible for ERCS to run both social media and other public relations tools at the same time?
14. Do you think social media use by the ERCS is supporting the use of other public relations tools? Please mention examples if you have any previous experience of linking them (eg. Running a campaign, coordinating voluntary services, etc.).
15. What are the opportunities for using social media as a public relations tool in ERCS?
16. What are the challenges of using social media as a public relations tool in the ERCS?
17. What do you suggest to better use social media as a public relations tool in the ERCS?

## Appendix 2

### **In-depth interview questions for experts managing social media outlets of the ERCS**

1. Level of education
2. How long have you served in your current position?
3. Do you think the top-level management of the ERCS endorsed social media as a public relations tool? If yes/No, what are the indications?
4. What do you think are the drives for the ERCS to adopt social media as a public relations tool?
5. Why is the already in use social media platforms of Facebook, Tweeter and YouTube selected among other available platforms?
6. Who are the publics targeted by your social media activities?
7. What is the nature of the messages conveyed on the ERCS's social platforms?
  - 7.1 What is the nature of messages conveyed about the following two topics?  
- COVID-19 and DONATION REQUESTS
8. Which types of messages perform better on your social media platforms? (i.e. text, picture, graphics, video, website hyperlink, etc.)
9. Which languages do you use to produce your social media messages? Why?
10. How often do you update your social media accounts or provide ready to use contents?
11. To what extent are you using the already available tools on social media platforms (messaging, calendar, donation, etc.).
12. Do you have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure your social media activities? If you have any, what are they?
13. Are your social media activities consolidated in your weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual report?
14. Are managing and content gathering for social media platforms consolidated among quarterly or annual measures of your performance?
15. Do you have an established system for gathering contents from other departments or regional branches?
16. Do you think the ERCS can run both social media and other PR tools at the same time?
17. Do you think social media use by the ERCS is supporting the use of other PR tools? Please mention examples if you have any previous experience of linking them (e.g. Running a campaign, coordinating voluntary services, etc.).
18. Do you monitor the social media activities of other humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia? If Yes/No, Why?
19. What are the opportunities of using social media as a PR tool in the ERCS?

20. The researcher used affordance theory for this study. The Theory stated that an individual or organization use social media to achieve a certain purpose. Can we see the adoption of social media affordances of Visibility, Persistence, Editability and Association to the ERCS experience?

20.1 Is the ERCS taking advantage of the social media affordance of Visibility? How? (Note: Visibility - social media afford users the ability to make their behaviors, knowledge, preferences and communication network connections visible to others.)

20.2 Is the ERCS taking advantage of the social media affordance of Persistence? How? (Note: Persistence - the information published on social media remains available to users and does not expire or disappear.)

20.3 Is the ERCS taking advantage of social media affordance of Editability? How? (Note: Editability - creating, recreating, recrafting and editing messages to make them more appropriate and correct before it is viewed by others and modifying and updating content that has already used/published.)

20.4 Is the ERCS taking advantage of the social media affordance of Association? How? (Note: Association - making or establishing connections between individuals-social ties, between individuals and content, or between an actor and a presentation and affiliating with the organization.)

21. What are the challenges of using social media as a PR in the ERCS?

22. What do you suggest to better use social media as a public relations tool in the ERCS?