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Examining the Crisis Communication Practice In The Amhara Region Communication Bureau: The Case Of The Fano- Government Conflict

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BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY
FACULTIES OF HUMANITY
DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

**EXAMINING THE CRISIS COMMUNICATION PRACTICE IN THE
AMHARA REGION COMMUNICATION BUREAU: THE CASE OF THE
FANO- GOVERNMENT CONFLICT**

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APRIL,2026

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Examining The Crisis Communication Practice in The Amhara Region
Communication Bureau: The Case of the Fano-Government Conflict.

By

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts
in Media and Communication

Advisor: Negesse Belay (PhD)

April 2026

Bahir Dar

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Examining the Crisis Communication Practice in the Amhara Region Communication Bureau: The Case of the ‘Fano–Government Conflict’ is my own original work and has not been submitted to this or any other institution for the award of any degree or certificate. This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Communication, Department of Journalism and Communication, Bahir Dar University. All sources of information and assistance received during this study have been duly acknowledged.

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Approval of Thesis for Defense

I hereby certify that I have supervised, read, and evaluated this thesis, examining crisis communication practice in the Amhara region communication bureau: the case of the FANO - government conflict, by Areyam Enyew, prepared under my guidance. I recommend that the thesis be submitted for oral defense.

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As members of the board of examiners, we examined this thesis entitled “Examining Crisis Communication Practices in the Amhara region communication bureau: the case of the FANO - government conflict” by Areyam Enyew. We hereby certify that the thesis is accepted to fulfill the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Media and Communication, Department of Journalism and Communication, Bahir Dar University.

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Abstract

The study examined crisis communication practices in the Amhara region communication bureau, focused on the Fano and government conflict. Political and security tensions in the Amhara region have escalated significantly since the conflict between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Fano militia began in 2023. The study explores how the Amhara Communication Bureau communicates the conflict between Fano militants and government forces. The study employed a qualitative research approach, including interviews and content analysis, to gather in-depth data on crisis communication practices, using a case study design to generate detailed insight into the bureau's communication practices. The research is guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as its theoretical framework. The study findings reveal that the Amhara Region Communication Bureau functioned as an instrument of the government, communicating official narratives during the conflict. The bureau primarily conveyed the government's propaganda through a one-way communication system and served as the government's mouthpiece. The study findings indicate that the bureau had a passive role and lacked a well-defined crisis communication strategy. These findings contrast with the principles of public relations roles during crises. The bureau targeted different audience segments, including elite and ordinary citizens, during crises. The institution's social media platforms to reach diaspora and elite audiences through a counterpropaganda communication system, while maintaining strong ties with mainstream government media to inform and reach local citizens. The study identified several institutional challenges during the Amhara region conflict, notably the declaration of a state of emergency, poor organizational coordination, a lack of clearly defined job descriptions, and varying staff perceptions of the crisis. The study concludes that communication institutions in Ethiopia have a problem with their communication strategies in times of crisis. The study will provide practical information about crisis communication strategies for institutions in a crisis. On the other hand, academically, it will enrich crisis communication literature and serve as a reference for future research.

Keywords: Conflict, Crisis communication, governmental force, FANO militants, public relations, state of emergency, Armed conflict

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Acronyms

SCCT- Situational Crisis Communication Theory

PR- Public relations

AMECO- Amhara Media Corporation

1. CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background of Study

Conflict is unavoidable in any environment, institution, or organization because people have diverse needs, wants, views, and ideas. Conflicts can be perceived differently and may arise naturally or due to human activity. Scholars stated that fundamentally, conflict arises when two or more parties believe their opposing interests, aims, or values are incompatible (Cooper, 2003). Additionally, conflict can result from individual differences in ideas, ambitions, and competition for resources. Conflict is everywhere, persistent, and widespread at all levels of life. Additionally, Conflict is a natural human propensity that is context-specific, complex, and multidimensional, including modern socio-political and ecological issues in addition to the old divisions of race, ethnicity, and religion (Jena, 2017). The researcher adds that with its context-specific, multi-causal, and multidimensional nature, conflict is an inherent and enduring feature of human civilization that contributes to rising levels of violence, unrest, and conflicts worldwide.

Scholars identified different conflict types encountered in Africa; the three main forms of conflict are intrastate, interstate, and trans-state (Bugajski, 2011). This study was specifically aligned and concerned with the interstate-type conflict. That shows that the Amhara region conflict, which opposed FANO militants to the current regime of the Ethiopian government. Ethiopian history shows that the country has had a lot of conflict in its history. According to Siyum (2021), Ethiopia has complicated conflict dynamics that are occasionally getting worse. Conflicts have grown sharply since the 2018 political reforms, and the government has been unable to settle them amicably. The scholar adds that Historical narratives, power struggles, property ownership, tribal differences, political interest, and inadequate institutions are the main causes of Ethiopia's frequent conflicts. Political entrepreneurs, unofficial organizations like "Fano" in Amhara and "Qeerroo" in Oromia, state and regional media, social media activists like tweeps and Facebookers, and outside forces like Egypt, Eritrea, and Sudan are the main players in Ethiopian strife. According to the scholars, Ethiopia is yet again at a historical crossroads. Various studies show that this problem is hierarchical and has existed since ancient times. As Lyons (2019) stated, Ethiopia has faced a variety of political difficulties throughout its history. The Derg administration was overthrown in 1991 by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its coalition, yet Ethiopian politics remained inflexible. Additionally, conflicts in Ethiopian politics typically arise after changes were

made in 2018 (Jima, 2023). After a brutal war in Tigray that left hundreds of thousands dead and battered, the federal government's international standing, Ethiopia is sliding into another conflict as many of Abiy's key wartime allies among the Amhara revolt against his rule. Therefore, the Amhara region has been in conflict between "Fano" and government forces for several months. Amhara, a region in northern Ethiopia, has experienced unprecedented levels of political violence, making it one of the most unstable regions in the country. However, the nature of conflict changes to a crisis when there is a lack of early warning and intervention at the early stages of disagreement that is escalating or becoming more intense; thus, conflict escalates to a crisis (Kurtz, 2008). On the other hand, a crisis is the peak of a conflict and is often associated with violent confrontations, whereas a conflict is a meeting of friction and disagreement caused by opposing, incompatible goals. According to Kurtz (2008), conflict has several stages. Conflicts are usually latent and go through stages of escalation, and lead to crises. Therefore, a crisis can occur in different ways. According to Abraham (2018), several explanations for the close connections between political crises and governance have led to on the impact of both good and bad governance on the political system in Africa. Political crises are fostered by governance and can take various forms, including avarice, excessive ambition, corruption, and the desire for unchecked power. The current study, which focuses on the crisis as a political issue for the two militant forces, shows the conflict between government forces and FANO militants in the Amhara region.

This study was conducted from the perspective of crisis communication, a starting point of conflict, and the crisis that arose between the Abiy regime and Amhara Fano militants. Therefore, the researcher analyses how the Amhara Communication Bureau communicates the current crisis in the Amhara region during conflict. In most cases, something or someone becomes aware of and interprets certain events, causing a crisis. Coombs (2007) stated that employees usually feel fear and anxiety when a crisis suddenly strikes. To put it simply, a crisis breeds distrust and seriously harms the organization and its employees. The organization practiced crisis communication during the crisis. Crisis Communication is an interdisciplinary field of research that studies how organizations communicate before, during, and after crises to restore normality to operations (Spradley, 2016).

Therefore, the Amhara Communication Bureau is a regional organization; it has own vision, mission, and goals. According to the website the institution, the main vision is to ensure a smooth flow of information between the regional government and the public, facilitate the process of

building a society enriched with information, and actively participate in the country's and Enhance the responsiveness of the regional government to the needs of society by maintaining an efficient and effective communication and information flow that serves the regional government organs and public sectors as a whole. Regarding the activity, the Amhara Communication Bureau is working on as a PR for the Amhara regional government. Therefore, crisis communication has been viewed as the cornerstone of public relations. (Hussain & Rawjee, 2014) stated that public relations professionals must create communication strategies in addition to crisis communication plans to mitigate cases of conflict in Favor of the organization's numerous stakeholders. Regarding the functions of public relations, the study examined the Amhara Communication Bureau's crisis communication practices and the role of the institution in the Amhara region conflict.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The conflict in the Amara region is a conflict between government forces and Fano militants. The Amhara region conflict is escalating into a crisis; therefore, in times of crisis, communication is essential. A crisis, as described by Sellnow and Seeger (2013), is an event that usually necessitates an immediate response or action from institutions and agencies to limit its impacts. Therefore, communication becomes more crucial in times of crisis. Based on the Amhara region's current situation, the researcher examined how to communicate the current crisis to the public and how to practice crisis communication during times of conflict. Previous research on crisis communication has been conducted in various contexts. Hussain & Rawjee (2014) conducted Crisis Communication at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: A Public Relations Perspective. The researchers found that clear communication needs to be preplanned and increased during a crisis. Additionally, the researchers found that communication plays a vital role in crisis response and problem-solving in higher education institutions. Although the research conducted in the crisis communication area emphasized the importance of effective crisis communication in higher education institutions, the current study differs from the previous one in terms of aim, locations, and settings. This current study focused on how crisis communication is practiced in the Amhara Communication Bureau during the armed conflict between FANO and the government in the Amhara region, Ethiopia.

Additionally, crisis communication was conducted in Sudan. The effectiveness of crisis communication in managing the Thai flood crisis in June 2016 (Gibreel, Musa et al., 2016). The

finding indicates that crisis communication has become a significant role in the management of crises in Sudanese institutions. It is suggested that Zain's early post-disaster communication strategy, combining accommodating and defensive approaches, helped prevent the flood situation from worsening. The researcher's findings implied that many Sudanese institutions have seen a lot of shortcomings in communication, particularly in crisis communication. Although the previous and current studies were conducted on crises in institutions and have similarities, the current study has differences in terms of location and nature of the crisis. The earlier study emphasized crisis communication in a natural disaster setting; however, this study focused on the crisis communication practice about the armed conflict between FANO and the government in the Amhara region. Therefore, this study seeks to address the above two research gaps in different areas.

Additionally, few studies have examined crisis communication practices in Ethiopia. An Assessment of Crisis Communication Practices and Challenges: The Case of the Federal Police Commission (Gebremedhin, 2020). This study was conducted within the national-level organization of the Federal Police Commission of Ethiopia. The study's findings show that the Federal Police Commission has no crisis communication strategy to apply in the critical situations described. Additionally, the study shows that the Federal Police Commission could not act through the three stages of crisis, namely pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis strategy, that should have been applied to tackle crises; thus, the Federal Police Commission did not evaluate the history of those crises to find out their strengths and weaknesses. However, the current study is different from An Assessment of Crisis Communication Practices and Challenges: The Case of the Federal Police Commission. The earlier study was conducted in a national-level organization, and it was conducted after the crisis of the selected three cases: first, the death of Engineer Simegnew Bekele on July 26, 2018; second, the deaths of General Seare and General Gezai Abera on June 24, 2019; and finally, Jawar Mohammed's 'safety call' for his supporters via social media on October 23, 2019. However, this study is different from the above research in terms of case time and locations of the study. The previous study explored and conducted three different cases after the crisis had happened. However, this study examined the practice of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau about a single case of the Amhara region conflict during the crisis time.

Additionally, there is limited research at the regional level on the Amhara Communication Bureau's practice of crisis communication. Therefore, the researcher examined and assessed how the Amhara communication bureau practiced crisis communication in the conflict between Fano and the governmental forces in the Amhara region. Additionally, this study is unique from the above; it is conducted during times of conflict.

1.3. Objective of the study

1.3.1. General objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the practice of crisis communication at the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between Fano and the government forces.

1.3.2. Specific objective

- To find out the role of the Amhara communication bureau during the conflict time to prevent the conflict between “Fano” and governmental forces.
- Assess how the Amhara communication bureau communicates the crisis to solve the conflict between” Fano” and the governmental force.
- Identify crisis communication challenges that the Amhara communication bureau faced between "Fano" and the governmental force.

1.4. Research question

1. What role does the Amhara communication bureau play during conflict time to prevent conflict?
2. How does the Amhara communication bureau communicate the crisis to solve the conflict between ‘Fano’ and governmental forces?
3. What are the challenges the Amhara communication bureau faces between the Amhara national regional state governments and Fano?

1.5. Significance of the study

The results of examining the practice of crisis communication at the Amhara Communication Bureau have various advantages. The result can help understand the role of the regional communication bureau during conflict times in managing conflicts before the crisis escalates. This study is the first study conducted at the regional level about crisis communication; therefore,

academicians and other researchers need to use it as a source for further research. The study provides insight for communication professionals regarding effective crisis communication strategies in the institution. Additionally, this study helps understand the current practices of crisis communication and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organization.

1.6. Scope of the study

This study examined crisis communication practices at the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between the government and FANO militants. The main aim of the study was to examine the practice of crisis communication at the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between FANO and the government forces. The study was conducted at the Amhara Communication Bureau in Bahir Dar city. The study was limited to the first six months of the state of emergency, a period with the current situation in the Amhara region, the conflict between FANO and the government forces. The study employed a qualitative research methodology to examine the Amhara Communication Bureau's practice of crisis communication in the conflict between the government and FANO. The Amhara communication bureau is the primary source of information for the people of the Amhara region. The institution works as public relations for the Amhara region government; therefore, based on its public relations role, it has a leading role in preventing conflict in the region. Therefore, based on the region's situation, this study examined the regional communication bureau's crisis communication practices in managing the crisis during the current conflict.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study aimed to examine the crisis communication practices of the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between Fano and government forces. This study was conducted during the first phase of the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region, and the researcher used a face-to-face interview and qualitative content analysis. Therefore, it was difficult to obtain sufficient information for this study because participants were reluctant to share information due to fear related to a sensitive political situation. Additionally, the study used the Amhara Communication Bureau's online content. However, the institution does not have an organized information archive, which makes it difficult to search for and collect information on the website. Another limitation is the translation from Amharic to English, which may lead to slight variations in meaning. Despite

these limitations, the study adjusted and provided valuable insight into crisis communication practice in the FANO government conflict.

1.8 Organization of the study

The paper is organized into six chapters. The first chapter covered the background of the study, the problem statement, the objectives, the research questions, the scope, the significance of the study, and the limitations. The second chapter reviews the related literature and the theoretical framework. The third chapter outlines the research methodology and design, data collection tools, data sources, sampling method, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques. In chapter four, the paper presents the results of the study, and chapter five discusses the implications and main findings of the study. The last chapter six presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concepts and definition of crisis

A crisis is a major event that could have a detrimental effect on the public, the organization, and the business, industry, and its reputation. According to Nteka (2021), a crisis is a multifaceted concept that indicates the existence of a challenging issue, an unusual or abnormal moment, or a critical stage. The scholar emphasized that a crisis usually refers to an unpredictable and uncertain situation that is dominated by tension and insecurity, and which may concern the individual family, business, organization, society, institution, or the international environment. The crisis is an essential and, in essence, recurrent aspect of any human endeavor. The economy, politics, military, civilization, and our personal lives are all experiencing a crisis (Rak et al,2022)

A crisis severely harms the company and its workers and fosters distrust (Coombs, 2007). Consequently, companies must prepare for such crises and alert staff members to potential unfavorable outcomes. Additionally, a crisis is an event that poses a serious risk to a system's operations and future, producing adverse effects and requiring management's careful attention. Therefore, to be ready, institutions and organizations should always anticipate these occurrences (Holaday and Coombs, 2012). Adkins (2010) also stated that a crisis is an unexpected and unpredictable event that arises from some kind of event, puts an organization's endangers stakeholders' expectations at risk, creates uncertainty within the organization, negatively affects organizational performance, may result in unfavorable outcomes, endangers the organization or the public, and results in responsibilities against the organizations involved. Ulmer et al. (2007) also emphasize that a crisis is an unexpected, non-routine incident or set of events that raises significant levels of uncertainty and either directly or indirectly exposes an organization's top priorities. A crisis is an occurrence, disclosure, accusation, or collection of events that endangers the integrity, standing, or existence of a person or an institution. It casts uncertainty on the public's perception of appropriateness, safety, or morality (Sapriel, 2003). The organization cannot immediately stop it on its own, and there is a significant, genuine risk to the organization. Coombs (2015) describes a crisis as an unpredictable event that can seriously impact an organization's performance, generate negative outcomes, and threaten important stakeholder expectations. A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome that affects an organization,

company, or industry, as well as its public, products, services, or reputation. Crises also disrupt regular business operations and occasionally put an organization's survival at risk (Fearn-Banks, 2002). According to the scholar's definition of crisis, this study assessed the communication aspect of the crisis in the Amhara region.

2.2. Phase of crisis

Crisis have their own phases. Sellnow and Seeger (2013) classified the three-phase crisis model as widely accepted by organizational crisis theorists and communication academics. On the other hand, Coombs (2017) identified crisis management staged approaches before, during, and after a crisis. According to Coombs, the pre-crisis phase will inevitably be the focus of a proactive, process-oriented approach to crisis management. The conceptualization and execution of this activity or function will occur during this phase if an organization has made the decision to establish crisis preparedness for the first time.

Coombs (2011) states that during the pre-crisis period of a crisis, members of the organization should take all reasonable precautions to prevent crises as well as be ready for them should they arise. Three steps are involved in signal identification during a crisis: scanning, capturing, and transmitting the signal to a crisis response center.

George (2012) stated that the stages of crisis management are: preventive or getting ready before a crisis arises; management, or communication during the crisis; and recovery or communicating after the crisis is passed. During the crisis preparation sub-stage, the development of the crisis communication plan and the selection of all parties involved take place. Coombs & Holladay (2014) state that signal detection, prevention, and crisis preparation are the three sub-stages of the pre-crisis stage. Pre-crisis stage activities occur before a crisis. The first line of defense in crisis management is identifying and documenting early warning signs that precede catastrophes. The organization used a proactive and open approach to crisis communication, which includes developing connections with the media before a crisis.

The second stage of crises, prevention, means employing communication techniques in the pre-crisis stage to stop or lessen issues that arise. Coombs asserts that crisis preparation is an action carried out before a crisis rather than during the actual crisis event.

As stated by Coombs (2007), crisis managers need to have a system in place for anticipating and handling possible crises. It is necessary to take action to avert impending catastrophes once they are identified. The difficulties facing the science of crisis management include attempting to

address crises before they occur and implementing this stage-by-stage planning procedure, which serves as the fundamental basis for successful crisis management. Planning's two main goals are to avert potential crises and prepare to handle them when they do arise. The goal of prevention is to lessen recognized hazards that can trigger a crisis. This is under the risk management initiative of an organization (Coombs 2006). According to Coombs (2011), the first of the two sub-stages, crisis recognition, requires crisis management to acknowledge the existence of a crisis. The second sub-stage, known as crisis containment, outlines the point at which the crisis manager must respond appropriately to prevent a worsening of the situation. One of their top goals needs to be keeping stakeholders informed. During the post-crisis phase, the organization must determine its next course of action. By reflecting on their past errors, they can improve their readiness for any future crises.

A trigger event that signals the start of the crisis and its conclusion when it is deemed resolved signals the start of the crisis event stage. There are two sub-stages within this crisis phase: crisis containment and crisis recognition. Understanding how events are classified and acknowledged as crises, as well as the methods for gathering data on them, is essential for crisis recognition. The organization's crisis response is the main emphasis of crisis containment. Crisis containment is the technique of managing operators' emergency responses and prioritizing activities to lessen damage and stop escalation during crucial events. Loevy (2011) stated that addressing emergencies with innovative solutions is part of crisis containment. Coombs (2007) stated that during the post-crisis stage, the crisis does not finish. After the catastrophe, a few crucial things need to happen. A real crisis is the best teaching tool for crisis communication. Three activities should be included in this phase: assessing crisis communication, drawing lessons from the crisis, and taking further post-crisis actions, including following up with stakeholders and monitoring crisis-related issues.

2.3. Concepts of communication

Numerous academics have attempted to define communication definitively. Most people think of communication as an exchange that takes place in a social setting. A sender (source) and a recipient are typically involved in communication (Fatimayin, 2018). According to Daniel (2013), communication is the act of providing individuals with information or expressing thoughts and feelings. Communication is more than just transmitting and decoding data, news, ideas, and emotions; it also entails individuals coming to a shared understanding. One way to characterize

communication as a topic of study is broadcasting and information transfer. It can entail any of the many vocations related to information transmission, including journalism, public relations, radio, and advertising (Fatimayin, 2018). Additionally, Communication is the exchange of ideas and knowledge in a way that the recipients can comprehend, respond to, and act upon the information (Touitou, 2020). Communication is the transfer of information from one person to another. Communication plays a vital role in an organization. When a crisis arises, the art of communicating should be carefully examined to avoid misguidance or miscommunication, especially from the media and the public. Communication is the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver so that it is received, understood, and leads to action. Communication is more difficult to communicate during a crisis than it is in regular interactions. Thus, a considerable amount of internal communication, as well as collaboration and cooperation, is necessary for effective communication. In a company, effective communication is essential during times of crisis; the art of communication should be closely examined to prevent misdirection or misunderstandings, particularly with the public and media. Everyone in an organization needs to be talented in communication to achieve the aims and objectives of the company and, ultimately, reduce the likelihood. Communication has different types. Based on the direction of information flow and the existence of feedback, communication types can be categorized. One-way (linear) and two-way (interactive) communication are the two main categories. In one-way communication, information moves from sender to receiver in this unidirectional process without prompt feedback or reaction. One-way communication is the dissemination of information without contact or feedback; while it may work well in some circumstances, it might not be appropriate in others (McEntee & Mortimer, 2013). In times of crisis, one-way communication is a top-down strategy in which information is sent from central authorities to the community without community input or comment. On the other hand, the two-way communication contrasts with linear information flow; two-way communication is a unidirectional exchange process in which both parties actively send and receive messages. During times of crisis, two-way symmetrical communication is a powerful and beneficial precondition for improving employee communication practices (Kim, 2018). Kim (2018) also emphasized that Clear and two-way symmetrical communication is a powerful precondition for improving employee communication practices in situations of crisis. In times of crisis, participatory communication is two-way, citizen-centered communication in which the public actively exchanges information, makes decisions with authorities and the media, and

actively contributes information rather than passively absorbing messages. Participatory communication is a citizen-led strategy that involves citizens in the creation and expression of knowledge by prioritizing interactive communication over the extraction or dissemination of information (Cornish & Dunn, 2009).

2.4. Crisis communication

Crisis communication is the conversation that takes place before, during, and after a terrible event between an organization and the public. According to Coombs & Holladay (2010), the techniques and approaches described in the dialogue are intended to minimize harm to the organization's reputation. When it comes to the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis, crisis communication tends to have a transmission-based perspective. Furthermore, it is helpful to think of crisis communication as a collection of communication techniques and procedures meant to promote stability and safety within an organization during times of crisis that threaten regular operations. Organizational communication, public relations, strategic communication, issues management, organizational rhetoric, crisis management, and management science are all included in the broader interdisciplinary field of disaster response and emergency management, which also includes crisis communication in organizations.

Coombs (2010) stated that over the past few decades, crisis research has given crisis communication a great deal of attention as a crucial part of crisis management. Information is required during a crisis, and through crisis communication, knowledge and information are honed and disseminated. According to Hale et al. (2005), crisis communication can be broadly defined as the process of gathering, processing, making decisions, and disseminating information to internal and external stakeholders to address a crisis, and it is the dialogue between the organization and its public before, during, and after the unwanted occurrence. Fearn-Banks (2002) also defined crisis communication as the methods and techniques employed intended to minimize harm to the organization's reputation. Crises can be resolved in a way that benefits the organization and its stakeholders, even if they might have disastrous consequences. This success is largely dependent on the communication that occurs after a crisis (Ulmer 2001). Crisis communication is the information shared before, during, and after a crisis by and between the public, authorities, organizations, the media, and impacted individuals. In crisis communication, two-sided

communications work better than one-sided ones, particularly in victim and avoidable situations (Kim & Sung, 2014).

2.5. Concepts and role of public relations

Public relations is essential to the operation of modern society. Public relations is a unique management function that aids in the development and maintenance of relationships, fosters collaboration between an organization and its community, suggests problem-solving or conflict resolution, and clearly states and emphasizes the management's duty to further the public interest. Using social science ideas and research techniques, public relations is a social science field and professional practice that fosters connections between the public and organizations (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001).

It is the deliberate, ongoing work done to build and preserve understanding and goodwill between a target audience and an organization. According to Alzahrani (2016), public relations is both an art and a science that facilitates communication between organizations and their audiences to enhance public perception and develop backup plans in case of emergencies. The goal of public relations is to carry out different strategies and communication to target audiences, locate different media, and connect with the right audience, communication bodies, foreign individuals, opinion leaders, and information centers. Public relations provides both an academic discipline and applied professional activity, communication-centered and research-based methods for comprehending, informing, and intervening to modify interactions between concepts, people, groups, and societies (McKie & Sriramesh, 2017). Public relations is the art of presenting a business (or individual) to the public, typically through the media, ideally in a positive way that enhances that business's or individual's reputation and consequently has a positive impact on that business's sales, the agreement of that business's services, and the business or individual's overall reputation (Bussey, 2011).

Public relations activities come under the disaster/crisis communication category, which also includes other forms of communication activities and the role played by the institution/organization in a crisis. The terms planning and continuous indicate that fostering goodwill and understanding requires creation and maintenance rather than being something that can be acquired. They also indicate that public relations operations are planned and that their goal

is to foster goodwill and understanding. Regardless of the activity to which they are related, public relations proves to be a creative and effective tool in addressing today's societal challenges. It can help solve issues and resolve crises, as well as promote an institution or organization, its goods, or services, by increasing its visibility in the public sphere. Public relations is vitally necessary in times of crisis. If proper communication management isn't taken into consideration, which is more than important in this kind of situation, the organization could suffer very catastrophic consequences (Petrovic, 2014). Public relations is the social science and art of assessing trends, forecasting their effects, advising organization leaders, and carrying out organized action plans that will benefit the organization and the public. The public must be informed about the policies, successes, special events, and beneficiaries to guarantee public acceptability. Effective information services are necessary to raise awareness and combat misinformation. Through organized campaigns and programs, public relations actively administers society and external publics, acts as a mediator and facilitator, and helps in times of crisis (Ristino, 2008).

2.6. Public relations model

Four common paradigms of public relations activity have been recognized by public relations scholars. These models include two-way asymmetrical, two-way symmetrical, public information, and. Press agency and public information are two ends of a craft public relations continuum that starts with journalism (public information) and ends with propaganda (press agency). Professional public relations can be thought of as a continuum with two-way models that span from conflict management (two-way symmetrical) to persuasion (two-way asymmetrical).

2.6.1. Press Agency / Publicity Model

In the early 1900s, corporations employed people under the press agency paradigm of public relations to respond to news and explain company practices, with an emphasis on exposing excess and corruption through press exposure and legal disclosure (Gower, 2008). In the press agency/publicity model, information is disseminated to the public in a one-way method, with an emphasis on publicity and promotion to improve the organization's media image (Wahyudi, 2023). In this model, obtaining positive media coverage or publicity is the main goal of public relations efforts. It is a one-sided debate and propaganda that is communicated in a one-way fashion. The concept presents a perspective that is based on deception, making truth, ethics, and accuracy non-essential. According to Tench & Yeomans (2009), the Press gentry is a one-way communication in

which the primary goal is to advance a specific worldview via the media and other channels without engaging in conversation with the intended audience. The one-way Press Agency/Publicity Model, which is common in public organizations, may be less successful in crisis management because of its bureaucratic restrictions and restricted two-way communication. (Eyo & Onyewuchi, 2025). Urinbayeva (2025) stated that instead of simply serving as an institutional communicator, public relations should act as a mediator between the community and the government by fostering communication and resolving disputes. On the other hand, Fearn-Banks (2011) noted that under the press agency model, public relations practitioners are motivated to increase awareness of their brands or goods. Fearn-Banks (2011) noted that the practitioners' abiding slogan, all publicity is good publicity, indicates a one-way transfer of information from the organization to the public. The number of practitioners adopting this approach is expected to decline as practitioners gain more expertise and as public relations as a profession gain greater recognition.

2.6.2. Public Information Model

This paradigm also uses a one-way method of information distribution. But unlike the publicity/press agent paradigm, it spreads factual and correct information. According to this approach, the public relations specialist functions within the organization largely like a journalist or news reporter in residence, and the material they distribute is largely objective. The distribution of accurate information is the main goal of public information in this case. This model relies on scientific persuasion for credibility. It employs research to sway influential audiences to support the organization's viewpoint. Additionally, the concept aims to foster understanding between the public and the organization. Here, the public relations specialist obtains input from the government and then applies pertinent communication theories to convince the public of the organization's viewpoint. the most effective way to persuade the public or audience is the main goal of this research. According to Tench and Yeomans (2009), public information is like press agency in that the goal of the activity is the one-way transmission of information, but it is distinct from press agency in that the pursuit of truth is central to its objectives. Since the purpose of the material is to enlighten rather than persuade, it must be true, accurate, and specific. The dissemination of objective information is the main goal here, according to Fearn-Banks (2011), the Public Information Model is distinguished by the intention to report information in a journalistic manner.

The importance of the truth sets it apart from the press and a gentry approach. This includes most public relations practices used by government organizations nowadays. Examples of this type of business are companies that just send out press releases. A one-way information flow from the organization to the public is another aspect of the public information model.

2.6.3. Two-Way Asymmetric Model

In this paradigm, also known as the scientific persuasion model, according to Fearn-Banks (2011), public relations practitioners use social science theory and research, including polls and surveys, to help persuade the public to adopt the organization's point of view. Although there is some feedback, the organization's communications management of the organization does not alter. In these kinds of asymmetric public relations campaigns, the organization always has the upper hand and assumes that the public should share its opinions. The Public Information Model is most frequently used in corporations. A letter alerting the public to a new policy or a phone message that is recorded but lacks technology for message return are two examples of asymmetric action. According to Doorley and Garcia (2007), a public relations professional should carry out research to ascertain the opinions of a specific constituency and then utilize that knowledge to assist in achieving the goals of the client. The client organization may benefit from this model, at least initially. Public communication efforts, according to Tench and Yeomans (2009), fit into the two-way asymmetric model of communication where a shift in the organization's goal is to persuade or increase target groups' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Despite the impression of increased public involvement in public sector communication through social marketing methods, this remains the case.

Furthermore, public communication, especially from national and supranational governments like the European Union, follows the asymmetric model of communication when the goal is to change people's knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. The strength of this model is scientific persuasion. It uses research to influence key audiences toward the organization's perspective. The model also aims to create mutual understanding between the organization and its public. In this context, the public relations communicator gathers feedback from the government and then applies appropriate communication theories to persuade the public to accept the organization's point of view.

2.6.4. Two-Way Symmetric Model

The most advanced and moral approach to public relations is thought to be the two-way symmetrical model. Public relations professionals try their hardest under this approach to help both sides comprehend each other's viewpoints. The aim of this is to achieve mutual understanding, albeit in a deeper and more meaningful way that benefits both parties. It is a helpful paradigm for resolving disputes both inside and between organizations and their constituents. Here, the public relations communicator acts as a go-between for the organization and its constituents, constantly working to foster understanding rather than hostility. According to Doorley and Garcia (2007), a public relations practitioner gathers information through research to ascertain the opinions of a certain constituency, which is then utilized to further the goals of the client organization and the constituency. In this paradigm, also known as the mutual understanding model, the public relations practitioner serves as a mediator between the organization and its audiences, as described by Fearn-Banks (2011). Unlike the other approaches, the practitioner aims to create a dialogue rather than a monologue. The communications program may cause changes in behavior from management or the public.

Social science theory and research are utilized to communicate rather than to persuade. Based on this paradigm, successful public relations initiatives are deemed excellent initiatives. Public relations campaigns that are a symmetrical bargain, compromise, listen, and communicate. The public understands the requirements and desires of the organization, and the organization knows what the public wants and needs. One instance might be having a phone conversation with customers or holding a public meeting where they can voice concerns and adjust. Organizations are often compelled by circumstances to engage in symmetrical communications with antagonistic publics during times of crisis.

2.7. Theoretical framework

The study applied Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in examining the practices of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau.

2.7.1. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory is a crisis communication theory that provides an organized approach for figuring out how organizations should communicate both during and after

a crisis. It was developed to guide companies in their choice of the best crisis communication. The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), proposed by Timothy Coombs, is a conceptual link between crisis response techniques and crisis. The situational crisis communication theory is one of the most influential theories for understanding crises and crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007). The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a framework for pre-crisis communication, which assesses stakeholder perceptions through examining crisis categories and intensifying factors. It also includes preparation and mitigation. The SCCT suggests that pre-crisis communication can lead to better crisis management, including damage limitation for corporate reputation (Dugan & Koç, 2020).

The application of the crisis communication strategies occurs in response to a threat against an organization's reputation, depending on the type of crisis, as well as the crisis history of the organization and its reputation (Coombs, 2019). Coombs also lists four major communication approaches in crisis, including denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. According to the theory, during crises, companies often use denial as a crisis response strategy for reputation management. In some cases, denial is an effective crisis communication strategy, generating positive publicity in the media, but sometimes a combination of approaches is effective. On the other hand, the denial crisis response strategy, as per SCCT, entails the denial of responsibility, which is detrimental to the perception of the organization because of the late response (Rahmawati, & et al 2024).

The diminishment crisis response strategy, as explained in SCCT, is a crisis response technique for reputation management, whereby a crisis is minimized or portrayed as not being as serious as it is. According to Coombs, it is one of the four major response attitudes, ranging from denial, which is no responsibility, to rebuilding, which is full responsibility. Effectively managing the impact on victims, the diminishment strategy under the SCCT theory aims to limit negative perceptions by addressing public attribution factors such as the initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and previous relational reputation.

To prevent the negative impact on the organization's reputation, the SCCT theory's rebuilding strategy involves proactive, transparent communication, consistency with the organization's values, and transparency. In the SCCT theory, the rebuilding method primarily involves effectively addressing the crisis's impact on victims. During a crisis, the rebuilding strategies primarily focus

on the organization's reputation and making the necessary changes to the business for long-term survival.

The fourth form of communication approach under the SCCT theory is Bolstering. Bolstering is a strategic approach to crisis management communication in which the organization reminds stakeholders of its previous successes, good work, and principles to foster a positive attitude and protect the organization's reputation. Therefore, the study examines the practice of the Amhara Communication Bureau based on the SCCT Approaches.

On the other hand, the theory suggests that different methods of crisis response techniques are used during a crisis. According to Coombs (2015), the crisis response components can be divided into three categories: instructive information, adjusting information, and reputation rehabilitation. In the SCCT theory, instructive information refers to crisis communication and the provision of guidelines for the public to effectively handle the crisis. According to Coombs's SCCT (2019), instructive and advisory information in messages from top administrators is part of crisis response strategies based on morals.

During a crisis, people are warned about the situation and how to protect themselves from physical harm and victimization. It has been suggested that changing the information strategy would help stakeholders manage their psychological well-being during a crisis. By providing information about the crisis, the modified information strategy appears to express sympathy. According to SCCT, prioritizing public safety during a crisis is an important strategy for managing reputation and reducing unfavorable opinions of an organization, as it aligns with prioritizing public safety over image management (Maulida, 2021). The most successful reputation rehabilitation during a crisis is achieved by using apology-based solution strategies, expressing sympathy, being transparent, and using their previous good reputation as an asset. Therefore, the study guides and examines the Amhara communication bureau's crisis communication practice based on the principle of situational communication theory, particularly whether the bureau adopts deny, diminish, rebuild, or bolstering strategies.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Research methodology refers to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Research methodology encompasses research design, data collection, and data analysis (Pheng & Premnath, 2019). Research methodology is important because it lays the foundation for the quality of the research process and outcome, underscoring the need to design the research in a manner that adequately addresses the research issues. Therefore, this section presents research design, research methods, data collection tools, sampling and sampling techniques, data analysis methods, ethical considerations, and the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2. Research Design

Research design is the plan, structure, method, and inquiry used to identify solutions to research problems or questions. It is a strategy or framework for conducting research, including data collection and analysis (Sharma et al., 2023). The study used a case study approach to examine crisis communication practices in the Amhara Communication Bureau. The case study method is highly effective for acquiring a comprehensive understanding of a subject, event, or phenomenon within its authentic, real-world context. A case study is a comprehensive, systematic examination of a single person, group, community, or other unit, where the researcher analyzes detailed data about multiple factors (Bryman, 2008).

This study used an explanatory case study design to examine crisis communication practice at the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between Fano and government forces. A case study research design focused on a specific issue in the Amhara region conflict; therefore, the study employed a single-case design to examine how the Amhara Communication Bureau communicates the current conflict in the region. This conflict is a series of specific issues in the current time in the Amhara region; therefore, an explanatory case study design is helping to provide in-depth information about how the Amhara Communication Bureau communicates the crisis. According to Zaidah (2003), explanatory case studies are used to explain the phenomena in the data and to closely evaluate the data at both surface and deep levels. Furthermore, a case study design involves looking into certain cases or incidents, which may be actual.

Explanatory instances are utilized in causal research, where pattern-matching can be employed to examine specific phenomena in difficult and multifaceted situations. The Amhara region conflict is one of the major cases in the region and the country. Therefore, an explanatory case study design is appropriate for investigating the context of the Amhara Communication Bureau's crisis communication practice during times of conflict.

3.3. Research method

Research methods are the techniques that are used by researchers to investigate a topic or issue. It has to do with research data collection instruments. According to Sam (2012), research methods assist us in gathering data and samples as well as in solving problems. This study employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to collect primary, first-hand, textual data and analyze it using specific interpretive methods.

3.4. Qualitative method

Qualitative research is a methodical strategy that uses in-depth investigation to comprehend human experiences, meanings, and viewpoints. Qualitative research methods are used to investigate and understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human situations. These approaches typically take a naturalistic and interpretive stance when addressing the scientific and practical problems facing society. These approaches draw on a range of empirical data, including case studies, direct accounts, and narratives, that highlight the deep meanings and motives of people and the routines and issues they face in their daily lives. As a result, the qualitative method can produce fresh hypotheses as well as new ideas and insights. It frequently focuses on the events that occurred in each setting at a specific moment without considering the implications and outcomes that might occur in the future or other contexts (Heigham & Croker, 2009). A qualitative approach is helpful for a single case study; however, it has its own limitations. According to Mwita (2022), the qualitative approach is flexible, provides detailed and complete information, supports the use of various data collection techniques, and reduces the possibility of missing data. However, the method has limited conflict processing and makes anonymity challenging. Although qualitative research is often criticized for its subjectivity and limited generality, the study employed methodological strategies to maintain objectivity. Specifically, the study used an interview and qualitative content analysis to support and show the qualitative results from the contents of the Amhara communication bureau during the conflict between FANO and the government forces.

Therefore, data interpretation was supported by direct evidence from the data, and the researcher ensured objectivity by minimizing personal bias.

3.5. Data collection method

This study used primary data collection tools, interviews, and qualitative content analysis as instruments of data collection to get deep, original, and full information about the practices of the Amhara communication bureau.

3.5.1. Primary data

According to Yayeh (2021), primary data are those obtained newly and for the first time, making them original. The study used primary data to obtain accurate, original information from respondents and news content about the Amhara Communication Bureau's crisis communication practice. Primary data is more important than secondary data because it provides sufficient information about the issues. According to Mesly (2015), primary data is current information, whereas secondary data is information that is related to the past. Primary data are those that the researcher has collected directly from the source, and the purpose of primary data is to provide a factual and unique answer to the current issue. Therefore, the researcher used two primary qualitative data collection tools: interviews and qualitative content analysis. According to Boslaugh (2007), content analysis is regarded as primary data when a researcher gathers and examines media content, especially for their own study. Primary data provides better quality, completeness, and uniformity, allowing for more accurate and thorough study findings. Additionally, a methodical approach to studying media content as primary data and content analysis concentrates on both textual and non-textual components (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015).

3.5.2. Interview

An interview is a primary data collection tool that the researcher uses to collect data directly from the participants. In qualitative research, interviews are a crucial technique for comprehending behavior in context and drawing significance from personal experiences (Dilley, 2004). When gathering in-depth information about people's opinions, beliefs, experiences, and feelings, interviews are a suitable approach. Conducting interviews can help in gathering original, new, and primary data. To collect in-depth data on crisis communication practice in the Amhara Communication Bureau, the researcher conducted interviews with Amhara employees of the

bureau, including the top leader of the institution. This study focused on the two active departments within the Amhara Communication Bureau's public relations and social media group that actively communicate information regarding the current conflict in the Amhara region.

3.5.3 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is an effective technique for methodically and context-dependently interpreting qualitative data from a subjective perspective (Selvi, 2019). Therefore, the researcher examined the Amhara communication contents related to the current crisis. Through in-depth data interpretation, qualitative content analysis provides a flexible, context-rich approach to investigating intricate research issues. This study analyzed the first six months of the Amhara communication bureau's content during the first phases of crisis and state of emergency in the region. During an emergency period, there is often intensive government communications, and it's different from other times. Therefore, the study analyzed the Amhara Communication Bureau's online content to support the interview results about the current conflict in the Amhara region.

3.6. Sampling

Given (2008) stated that a sample is the collection of real data sources selected from a wider population of possible data sources. There are two main approaches to sample selection: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. While probability sampling bases the number of members included in a group's sample only on the group's size in the population, non-probability sampling focuses on selecting sample members based on their capacity to meet predetermined criteria. This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method to identify the qualitative contents of the Amhara communication bureau and interview participants of the study.

3.6.1. Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which researchers use their expertise and judgment to select participants based on traits relevant to the study's goal. According to Curtis (2011), Purposive sampling, as opposed to probability approaches, selects people using expert judgment to provide a more representative sample.

Bhardwaj (2019) stated that when a researcher uses purposeful sampling, they can acquire future results since they can speak with the target population directly. Since the samples chosen will be suitable study participants, the researcher will essentially obtain real-time results because the

participants will possess the necessary expertise and have a thorough understanding of the issue. The optimal use case for purposeful sampling is when researchers wish to concentrate closely on relatively small samples. Researchers use purposive sampling, drawing on their knowledge to select a sample that will be most helpful to their research.

According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling depends on the researcher's judgment in determining and choosing the people, situations, or events that can offer the most information to meet the goals of the study. Therefore, the method primarily considers the researcher's assessment of who can offer the most information to meet the study's aims. This study focuses on current and sensitive cases of the Amhara region to examine the practice of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau. Therefore, the researcher selected the participants of the interview and the contents of the Amhara Communication Bureau by purposefully to get sufficient and relevant data from respondents as well as the contents.

3.6.2. Sampling technique

Sampling technique is the process of choosing a representative sample for research purposes from the total population. This study focused on the Amhara Communication Bureau's public relations department and the institution's social media groups. The public relations department and the social media group department are actively working in the Amhara communication bureau during the current conflict in the region.

3.6.3. Sampling technique for interviews

The study included six interview participants from two departments, including a top leader of the Amhara Communication Bureau. The researcher selected the interview participants based on their responsibilities and experience. Three participants were purposefully selected from the public relations department, two from social media groups, and one top leader of the Amhara Communication Bureau. The researcher selected individuals from these departments based on experience and their work. The institution Social Media Group was established by the bureau after the crisis began, and it is directly responsible to the Amhara Communications bureau. The group consists of six members, selected based on their experience and performance to share information during the crisis, prepare government statements, and disseminate government messages on the institution's social media. Therefore, in this study, the researcher chose two experts from the social

media group to prepare statements for the government and primarily share information on the institution's social media pages during the crisis.

3.6.4. Sampling technique for content analysis

In this study, the qualitative content is used to support the interview results. Scholars suggest that combining various forms of analysis in studies, triangulation in qualitative research, improves their validity and quality while also increasing their reliability and credibility (Benavides & Restrepo, 2005). In the study, the researcher selected the content from the communication bureau's social media page for the first six months of the crisis in the region. This time, there is a state of emergency in the region. Therefore, the researcher chose the first phase of the state of emergency to examine crisis communication practices at the Amhara Communication Bureau. The researcher intentionally selected the bureau's news and press releases that directly relate to the crisis in the Amhara region. The researcher used various news and government statements from the Amhara Communication Bureau to examine its crisis communication practices. The Amhara Communication Bureau uses social media platforms to disseminate information to the public. Across different platforms, the institution's Facebook pages have many followers. However, the content posted on the page was not systematically organized on the Facebook page. It was difficult to find the content of posts on the institution's Facebook. Therefore, due to a lack of systematic order information on Facebook and archive documents in the institution, the researcher used a second large social media platform of the institution, Telegram. According to one interview participant in a social media group, information dissemination on Facebook is simultaneously shared on Telegram. Therefore, the contents of the Amhara communication bureau's telegram channel are the same as those posted on Facebook.

3.7 Ethical consideration

The study followed all the ethics of research. The researcher obtained permission to obtain information from the Amhara Communication Bureau by obtaining a letter of ethical clearance from Bahir Dar University's Humanities College. During the interview, the researcher clearly explained that the data provided by the participants would be used only for academic purposes. The researcher explained that participants' identities would be kept confidential and that they would be assigned alphanumeric codes. Additionally, the researcher informed participants of their right to withdraw at any time, ensuring all interviews were conducted voluntarily.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness ensures the integrity, quality, and accuracy of research results. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are used to evaluate trustworthiness in qualitative research (Kakar et al., 2023). Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, based on the research objective, the researcher prepared open-ended questions, allowed sufficient time for follow-up questions, and recorded the participants' interview sounds to verify the credibility of the study data. The transferability of the study includes participants with different educational backgrounds, including bachelor's and master's degrees. Additionally, participants' ages varied, and both male and female participants were included.

To ensure the study's reliability, the researcher purposively selected participants who provided sufficient and high-quality information. The researchers employed face-to-face interviews in their own individual offices of the Amhara Communication Bureau. After collecting data, the audio recording was transcribed into text and then converted into English using Google Translate. Then the data was organized by different teams based on the study's research objectives. The other trustworthiness measurement is the confirmability of the results, which is presented based on participant responses by quoting the participant directly. As much as possible, the researcher was neutral in presenting the results of the research data. Overall, the study results come from the study participants.

3.8 Data analysis

In this study, data were collected using qualitative research methods, including interviews and qualitative content analysis. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods. According to Dawadi (2020), Thematic analysis is a technique for methodically identifying, categorizing, and providing context for meaningful patterns within a dataset. It helps researchers see and understand shared or collective meanings and experiences by concentrating on meaning across a dataset. In addition, the media texts were analyzed for their qualitative content analysis to support and triangulate the interview findings.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 RESULTS

This chapter presents the qualitative findings of the study focused on examining the practice of crisis communication at the Amhara Communication Bureau during the conflict between ‘Fano’ and government forces. The study used qualitative research methods, including individual interviews and content analysis. Six participants were included in the interviews: three from the public relations department, two from the social media department, and one top leader of the Amhara Communication Bureau. The study also analyzes six months of online content from the bureau's social media pages. The researcher prepared open-ended questions in Amharic, and the responses were translated into English using Google Translate. The interview findings were analyzed through thematic analysis, while the content was examined via qualitative content analysis. The main data collection method was interviews, and qualitative content analysis served as a supplementary approach to support the findings. As a result, the researcher conducted interviews to gather detailed information from staff in the Amhara Communication Bureau's public relations and social media groups. To meet ethical requirements for confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were assigned code symbols. The three respondents from the public relations department are coded PR1, PR2, and PR3; the two participants from social media are coded SP1 and SP2; and the top leader is coded TL1.

Table 1 Summary of interview participants

No	Code	Gender	Department	Interview date	Interview duration	Interview medium
1	PR1	M	PR	30.04.2024	52 minutes	Face-to-face
2	PR2	M	PR	30.04.2024	40 minutes	>>
3	PR3	M	PR	30.04.2024	43 minutes	>>
4	SP1	F	SM	02.05.2024	30 minutes	>>
5	SP2	M	SM	02.05.2024	56 minutes	>>
6	TL1	F	TL	02.05.2024	49 minutes	>>

4.2 Results of the interview data and qualitative contents

4.2.1 Perception of the beginning times of the current crisis in the Amhara region

This study examines how the Amhara Communication Bureau managed crisis communication during the conflict between Fano and government forces. Therefore, the researcher asked the interviewee when the institution believed the crisis started. Participants offered different views on

when the conflict in the Amhara region began. While most reported that the conflict in the Amhara region started at the end of July 2023, others believed it began around April 2023. Those who thought it started in July described various trends in the conflict, especially since 2008, that have affected different areas of the region. However, the violence intensified, and the conflict reached a stalemate after July 2023. This suggests that participants who believed the conflict started then associate it with the period when violence was more apparent. Overall, most participants viewed July 2023 as the starting point, marking a significant turning point.

However, another participant said that the crisis started in March 2023 in the region.

“In my view, mainly, this crisis started when the direction came from the federal government that the special force of the Amhara region should be disbanded in March 2023” (PR2, April 30/2024).

This suggests some participants view earlier political and security tensions as the start of the Amhara region conflict. The Amhara Communication Bureau observed many signs of conflict but did not take any action to resolve it quickly. Therefore, the data indicates that the Amhara Communication Bureau played a passive role in preventing the crisis. Additionally, the data shows different perceptions and a lack of coordinated communication within the institution.

4.2.2 The reasons why the crisis was not solved in a short time

The researcher asked the participants in this study what type of crisis communication activity was conducted by the Amhara communication bureau during the current crisis to resolve it quickly.

One participant from the institution's social media group, May 02/2024, highlighted that the Amhara communication bureau focused on different activities during the first phase of the crisis. The federal government instructed them to develop a crisis communications plan, which the agency created after the crisis had already begun in the region. The bureau then distributed that plan to the zone and district structures that are operational.

The results suggest that during the crisis, the Amhara Communication Bureau engaged in various activities to address the situation quickly; however, the federal government-led institution had a different plan. Even though signs of conflict and tension existed before the crisis, the Amhara

Communication Bureau was not actively involved and had no pre-crisis plan to manage the early stages of the crisis.

Other participants identified several factors that contributed to the prolonged crisis and stated that the institution is providing the public with information based on previous experiences from the northern Ethiopia crisis by producing various reports to inform the public.

The region is managed by a command post, working in cooperation with the communication bureau. The institution uses various communication methods to issue numerous press releases and documentaries about the northern conflict crisis to the public to resolve the crisis. The communication bureau serves as the government's spokesperson by providing current information based on effective work (PR1, April 30, 2024).

This result shows that the command post controlling the institution's activities, with the institution acting as a propaganda tool for the government. The command post bears the main responsibility for managing the crisis in the Amhara region. The result indicates that the communication bureau is not independently managed but instead relies on directives from the government and the command post. The institution was simply used as a mouthpiece for the government, which hindered the quick response to the crisis. As a result, the institution had a passive role in managing the crisis in the Amhara region.

Another participant explained that the ongoing insecurity in the region prevents institutions from engaging in communication efforts to address the crisis. According to the participant, the challenge of communicating about mobility restrictions makes it difficult for the institution's activities during this crisis.

We haven't taken any special steps to resolve the war from the start because the current situation in the region isn't favorable for any activity. During the two or three months of the crisis, almost all institutional experts lacked internet access except for the heads of the institutions (SP2, May 02, 2024).

The result suggests that insecurity, distraction, and lack of communication were the reasons for the prolonged crisis.

The participant follows up.

However, we believe that we have made efforts to bring the two sides closer together and achieve peace because the government repeatedly calls for peace with the armed forces, and we have consistently provided information, emphasizing that peace is a better option than war. Additionally, the information published by the social platform of the office can mainly help build a positive relationship between the public and the government.

The results show that the situation in the Amhara region is unsafe for any communication activities during the beginning of the crisis. The Amhara Communication Bureau has not given any special attention to the crisis. However, the institution tries to communicate and distribute the government's narratives about the current crisis. The Amhara Communication Bureau has carried out various activities on behalf of the government, and its work essentially serves as the mouthpiece of the government.

The Amhara communication bureau's online content indicates that the government is trying to address the crisis through security and peace strategies.

“While the government is working to bring peace to all parts of the country, it has also begun training several strike groups and militia forces to combat extremists who have abandoned peace and entered the jungle” (January 28/2024).

The contents suggest that the government's actions are confusing and contradictory. The above interview participants show that the government aims to promote peace and stability through reconciliation. However, it also prepares security forces for armed activities. This indicates that the coexistence of peace efforts and military readiness may contribute to the perception of unclear crisis management.

Other participant results show that the main reason for the current crisis in the region is the federal government's decision to disband the region's special forces. This decision has plunged the region into an unnecessary crisis, and communication is highly restricted with armed groups. According to the interviewee, the institution could not directly communicate with these armed groups to create dialogue and coordination. Additionally, the armed groups are not willing to negotiate or engage in dialogue for peace. However, the Amhara Communication Bureau is using soft power by informing the public peacefully and calling on armed groups to negotiate and engage in dialogue

to resolve the crisis. Since the armed groups refuse to negotiate, the bureau has announced that it has resorted to hard power to bring peace to the region.

The armed group has informed us that they do not want peace, and they prefer to continue the war through various extremist media channels, and they believe that negotiations are a sign of weakness. Specifically, the armed groups in the Gojam area said, "Don't think about negotiating with the armed groups"(SP2, May 02, 2024).

The results suggest that some armed groups intentionally reject peace negotiations and prefer to continue armed conflict. Additionally, opposition media outlets are more active than official media in promoting their agenda and influencing public opinion. Interview participants stated that the government called for negotiations and peace with the armed groups; however, the researcher did not find any content indicating such calls for peace on the institution's social media pages.

The other participant described a government strategy for addressing the ongoing conflict with an armed group. The dual approach involves the government informing the public about military action while trying to negotiate peace.

Now, the government is fighting in two ways to end the war quickly and establish a peaceful government. It continues to inform the public about its attack campaign through various media outlets. Meanwhile, the government has repeatedly called for peace with the militants. However, the armed group has not accepted the peace offer and, wishing to continue fighting, has now launched a separate offensive campaign. As a result, the government is carrying out a campaign of violent attacks (SP1 May 02 /2024).

The results show that the government employs a dual strategy of transparency and military force. By broadcasting its military actions through its own media, the government assumes that the current crisis has ended through its hard power. Consequently, the government quickly relays news of its victory to the public to persuade them. The communication bureau reports the government's campaign attack, and the government maintains control of the region by force, but the reality seems different. This indicates that crisis communication remains focused on institutions, depends on operational procedures, and involves limited participatory interaction.

4.3 During crises time

4.3.1 Delivering information to the public during a crisis.

Communication during a crisis is crucial; the researcher inquired how the Amhara communication bureau provides information during such times. The institution issues various reports for both regional and out-of-region audiences during the current regional crisis. One participant mentioned that the institution frequently uses different media platforms to share information and maintain transparency. Specifically, Facebook is more popular and effective for disseminating messages. The participants described the institution using social media and a local communication network to inform the public about current events.

"We believe we can effectively share reports on the current crisis through the Amhara Communication Bureau's Facebook page. With over 3.7 million followers, this platform allows us to reach a wide audience. The office will collaborate closely with the communication structures of the zones and districts to distribute different press releases on new ideas and government information, as well as to relay the public's sentiments and opinions to the government (PR3, April 30 /2024).

The result indicates that, during a crisis, the bureau aimed to use social media, especially Facebook, as its main platform to share timely information with the public because the Facebook page had many followers. Furthermore, the institution works with the government structure of the zones and districts' communication centers to share the government's interests and statements. Additionally, the results suggest that although the communication bureau uses social media and other platforms to reach a broad audience, its communication is mainly one-way, top-down, reactive, and focuses on providing information, while also limiting public participation, influence, and participatory peacebuilding. Therefore, the Amhara communication bureau delegates information from the public using one-way, top-down methods.

Another participant in this study noted that the institution provides different peace orientation reports to the public. Governments often try to prevent escalation by informing citizens about the effects of violence and countering misinformation that may spread during crises. The following statement from a communication official highlights the challenges of maintaining public trust while addressing propaganda, public dissatisfaction, and ongoing conflict.

From the beginning, we have been trying to inform the public that war cannot answer the questions of the Amhara people for any reason, so we want to ensure that this current crisis does not reach the Amhara region. However, the armed group has been spreading propaganda that can divide the government and society. The people, noticing some of the government's weaknesses, have shown a tendency to turn to armed groups. This has made our work more difficult. Still, we have continued to deliver government information without interruption (TL1, May 02/2024).

The result highlighted the communication bureau's efforts to diffuse conflict and uphold stability in the Amhara region. The institution initially stressed that the government had tried to prevent war by informing the public that war is not the solution for the people of the Amhara region. Therefore, the Amhara Communication Bureau focused on the peaceful resolution of the crisis in the area. However, the propaganda of the armed group is more persuasive than the messages from the Amhara Communication Bureau.

The qualitative content of the Amhara Communication Bureau reflects the interview results. Statements from communication leaders can reveal how governments frame a crisis, promote peaceful resolutions, and communicate their positions to the public.

The question will not be answered by killing, but we must work together wisely to answer the question of the Amhara people. Deputy Head of the Communications Bureau of the Ethiopian Government (Ms. Hlena Mebratu, January 30, 2024)

The statements highlight that violence is not the answer to the political and social issues facing people. The content results show that the government's communication narrative focuses on peaceful solutions. The other parts of the Amhara communication bureau support the interviewee's idea.

"The people have never benefited from the destruction of peace. Perhaps the only ones who would benefit from this are illegal groups that think they can gain glory by plundering and causing chaos through violence." (Arega Kebede, President of the Amhara Regional State, September 11, 2015)

The news from the Amhara communication emphasizes that peace is the only solution to resolve the crisis. However, the other news from the Amhara Communication Bureau suggests that war is the only way to stop the conflict in the region.

“The security structure should be strengthened to address the security issues faced by the Amhara region.” (Chief Inspector Wedaje Asmar, Head of the Lasta District Peace and Security Office, January 24, 2024)

The result shows that the communication bureau has tried different approaches. However, despite these efforts, there were few opportunities for public discussion or input, and all communication remained top-down. Additionally, the communication bureau has been inconsistent in its activities.

Other participants stated that the Amhara communication bureau's communication activity is in crisis in the Amhara region.

As an institution, we are currently in a state of emergency and are working closely with the command post while issuing numerous press releases to the public. The Communications Office serves as a bridge between the public and the government. Therefore, we provide frequent updates in the media. Since the institution functions as the government's spokesperson, we continuously relay the government's press to the public and the Communication Bureau, which mainly focuses on persuasive efforts (PR1 April 30, 2024).

The results show that the Amhara communication bureau functions as the mouthpiece of the regional government. The institution relays information to the public on behalf of the government. However, it believes it serves as a bridge between the public and the government during the crisis, but the findings reveal a gap between the bureau's intended role and its actual operations.

The other participant of the communication bureau stated that during the crisis, the information delivery system is different from usual times. The institution provides information to the public with the approval of the command post.

Our current method of delivering information to the public differs from before because the region is now managed outside the formal government system. The region is in a state of emergency, so we can't share information with the public as we normally would. We can't report that we assume that to manage the current situation (PR3 April 30 /2024).

The interviewee data is supported by the qualitative content of the Amhara communication bureau news during the crisis period.

“The joint efforts of the Defense Forces and the people have brought relative peace to the area”: (Lieutenant General Shuma Abdetta, November 22, 2016).

The interview results and content show that the Amhara Communication Bureau has not informed the public about the crisis because it is restricted by the command post. This indicates that the command post has full control over the communication bureau's activities, which limits freedom, public participation, and participatory crisis management. Therefore, the crisis communication practices of the Amhara Communication Bureau are reactive, top-down, and entirely dependent on the command post.

Participants of the Amhara communication bureau's social media department also stated that the institution has a duty to inform the government of its interests.

“We are working as the mouthpiece of the government, so we are preparing and conveying the ideas that the government wants to reach the public through news and short articles on social media and other media outlets" (SP 1 May 02, 2024).

The result shows that the communication bureau is a government tool used to spread information, interests, and propaganda.

On the other hand, the institution serves as a medium for creating and shifting the agenda, aiming to omit the crisis.

The institution presents various development and social issues to the public to help them forget the current crisis. The institution's experts are divided into different groups and continuously monitor and evaluate different sectors of social media news, which are overseen by the Amhara Communication Bureau (SP2, May 02/ 2024).

The result indicates that the institution, changing the direction and blurring the narrative, disseminates. Additionally, the Amhara Communication Bureau has the highest authority in the region and controls the communication activities of other sectors; therefore, all communications from other sectors are controlled and managed by the Amhara Communication Bureau.

The interviewee followed up with the Amhara Communication Bureau, stating that the crisis has been given national attention and recognition.

The institution is conducting another activity in which communication experts from districts and zones identify the most pressing problems and monitor weekly data from the institution. We have seen the report of the zones and districts, and then we deliver it to the relevant officials of the government. So, we have dealt with the current crisis, and the regional crisis is a national agenda of the government for 58 ministers.’

The result shows that the institution, by blurring the crisis and reporting the problem to higher authorities, is seen as a success. This implies that although crisis communication is implemented, it is institution-centered and prioritizes government narratives above participatory communication.

4.3.2 Communicates the current levels of crisis in the Amhara communication bureau

The researcher asked the participants of the study about how the Amhara Communication Bureau communicates the ongoing crisis of the Amhara region. The participants emphasized the shift from crisis-related communication to development-oriented messages and the promotion of national dialogue as a solution to regional problems.

Currently, we do not share information about war or crises with the public. We have shifted the community's focus by developing ideas that highlight growth and progress. Additionally, we are addressing the country's issues by accepting or rejecting agendas from the federal government, especially emphasizing that national dialogue is the best way to resolve the Amhara region's problems. In my view, the crisis has not been fully resolved, but there is now relative peace in the region compared to before (PR1, April 30, 2024).

The result indicates that the institutional communication strategies shift away from crisis-related toward development narratives. According to the results, the communication bureau's deliberate agenda-setting aims to change public opinion.

The content of the Amhara Communication Bureau also shows the interview results, which show that communication emphasized development issues.

“Development projects initiated in Gondar city will accelerate the city's social and economic growth. The current peace in the Amhara region has created a favorable

environment for restarting infrastructure construction in cities that had been halted”. (Dr. Ahmedin Mohamed, November 21/2024)

The result shows that the institution is working to bring the community out of the crisis by spreading various government propaganda and things that show progress. The result implies that although the Amhara communication bureau's efforts concentrate on influencing public perception and awareness, communication is insufficient to resolve the situation on its own. This illustrates that communication power is limited in conflict situations in the Amhara Communication Bureau.

Other participants of the Amhara Communication Bureau aim to minimize the crisis of the region's communication bureau by doing different communication activities. However, the activities conducted in the institutions have not yielded satisfactory results because the region is in crisis, and the safety of experts in zones and districts is not guaranteed. However, the Amhara communication bureau is conveying the government's position to the public along with the communication structure that deals with the current crisis.

“By preparing a public forum, we are communicating information about the current crisis through the institution's social media and the mainstream media of the region. However, I do not believe that we are doing it properly because the communication experts in the zone and district cannot move freely and get information. However, now the region has a relatively peaceful situation” (PR2 April 30/ 2024).

The result indicates that the institution did not conduct any crisis communication during the crisis. This implies that during the crisis, communication shows insufficient preparation and the lack of an independent, public-facing communication system.

However, other participants stated that

Our job is to serve as a bridge; it is to convey the meaning of government to the public. Since the various institutions in the region are responsible for their own communication offices, we are having the leadership of each office go out into the media and provide information to the public about the current situation (SP2, May 02/ 2024).

The result indicates that the organization is working as a bridge by convincing the government of its interest. This clearly shows that the communication bureau doesn't know its own roles. On the other hand, the other participant stated that the institution is promoting government propaganda.

Mainly, our work is to build the image of the region so that the institution can get public support. We are providing governmental information to the public. We inform to publics that differences can be resolved peacefully. From our point of view, there is a relatively peaceful area. For example, education has started in some zones, government structures have started in each district, and government institutions are being established (PR3 April 30 /2024)

The result indicates the communication bureau is working as a propaganda tool; it follows one-way communication to disseminate information to the public about the crisis. The content of the institution implies the interview results.

"With the joint efforts of the Defense Forces and the regional security forces, the general leadership and our peace-loving people, it has been possible to achieve relative peace in most areas of our region. (Arega Kebede, President of the Amhara Regional State, November 19, 2016)

The content indicates that the communication bureau is disseminating the victory of the government forces in the conflict in the Amhara region. This clearly indicates that the institution is working on the image-building of the government.

The social media group participant of the study in the Amhara Communication Bureau said that the Amhara Communication Bureau emerged as a social media group after the crisis began , and the group is continuously informing the public of the government's interests, and the public is following the government.

By preparing press releases on current affairs, we are making society aware of the current situation so that society can prevent the crisis itself. We are constantly conveying to the public that the government is willing to negotiate and solve the problem through peace talks on how to stop the war. At present, our job is to provide information and give suggestions to the top management while looking at the situation.

The result shows that the institution communicates about the crisis from top to bottom. Additionally, the institution works as a persuasion activity during the Amhara region conflict. The Amhara communication bureau's news content also indicates the above interview result.

“South Gondar Zone Chief Administrator Ato Tilahun Dejene urged the community to work in coordination with the government to restore the relative peace achieved in the zone to a state of complete peace” (November 20, 2016).

The content shows one-way communication from the top manager to ordinary people. Additionally, the communication bureau tells the people that the region is peaceful and safe. This indicates that the institution is a propaganda tool to transfer only one-way communication.

Another participant in the study stated that the institution believes the current situation in the region's peace; however, the bureau is working on various activities to resolve the crisis.

At present, the region is largely peaceful, yet the media coverage emphasizes the negative aspects, and the public assumes the region is at war. However, we discussed with the people the situation of the people along with the security forces. For example, in Dega Damot worda, the President of the Amhara region went directly to the place and moderated the people. Likewise, in other places, other leaders went and moderated the people after the extremists left. In addition, in the area called the Shiwa Ifat zone, we organized a forum and held a discussion (TL1 May 02/2024).

The result clearly shows that the Amhara communication bureau's crisis communication practice is a one-way method. According to the participant, the regional president is going to the districts and discussing with the community about the current situation of the region. This clearly shows that the office is acting on behalf of the government, and although it claims to be doing public relations work, it is conveying the government's goals and functions. The crisis communication of the Amhara Communication Bureau is from top to bottom, conveying information from the government to the public.

4.3.3 Media relations

In times of crisis, media relations allow organizations to manage the framing of events in a way that minimizes uncertainty and escalation, retains public trust, and distributes correct information.

The Amhara Communication Bureau has relations with different media to communicate the Amhara region conflict. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants of this study about the relationship between the Amhara Communication Bureau and the media during times of crisis.

4.3.4 Mainstream media relations during the current crisis

The Participants of the study stated that the Amhara communication bureau has strong relationships with different mainstream media, and it is the backbone of the media. The Amhara Communication Bureau reports on the current crisis to the regional public by using various media, with the regional media organization AMECO serving as the primary and most active media source of information.

The participants stated that the institution has professional journalists, and any media activity is guided by the Amhara communication bureau. Especially by providing suggestions to the media, the institution enables them to communicate the government's interests to the public. All participants of the Amhara Communication Bureau on the institution's media relationship during crisis times indicate that the institution used a one-way communication system. The results show that reports produced by the institute are used directly in the media. Additionally, the Amhara communication bureau gives directions on which issues to report and gives suggestions by personally calling the media.

Our institution has a close relationship with the media. As an institution, we meet with the media once a month. There is a media forum between the Amhara Communication Bureau and different media in the region. The institution gives an agenda to evaluate the reporting system of the media, considering the current crisis. We prepare various news programs and documentaries about the current crisis and deliver them to the public and the media (PR1, PR2 & SP1).

The result shows that the media agenda was determined by the Amhara Communication Bureau during the crisis time. The bureau organized a monthly media forum that is led by officials of the institutions. This official-centered communication approach implied that the bureau's function is more focused on disseminating information than on strategic public relations. Additionally, the results indicate that the Communication Bureau controls the communication activity of the region

by guiding different media in the region during the crisis time. The institution is giving comments on how the media should be reporting the current crisis in the Amhara region.

The other participant of the study stated that the office is using various domestic community radio stations and foreign media outlets to disseminate information about the crisis.

In addition to mainstream media, like AMECO, Fana, ENA, ETV, Abay, as well as outside the country, VOA, and Dochebelle, are the main information dissemination media. The regional community also receives from the media, particularly through the university community radio. As the chairman of the board of government leaders at the University Community Radio, they make it easy for government information to reach the public.

The interviewee follows up.

The institution evaluates what the media is doing, whether they are reporting the truth to bring peace or conveying their own personal feelings to the public. Our relationship with the media is very good, especially with the executives of Fana and ETV. Being the people of this area and knowing the problems of the region closely, they are making great contributions through the media and serving the region in good spirits. We will give the media an agenda, and we will let them know that we want this matter to be reported. We will make them report by following their own editorial policy (TL1, May 02/2024).

The result indicates that the Amhara communication bureau uses one-way communication, the same as other forms of communication in media relations, by giving an agenda and evaluating the content. The media officials are the political officials; therefore, easy to control the communication system.

4.3.5 Social media usage and monitoring during the current crisis

The Amhara Communication Bureau has different social media platforms to disseminate information to the public. Therefore, the researcher asked the interviewee how the institution used social media to disseminate information

The social media participants stated that

The Amhara Communication Bureau published different information on the official website. The institution used social media to provide information for the foreign community (diasporas). Specifically, in the Amhara communication bureau, the social media department was organized after the start of the crisis, and it is reporting about political issues besides the government. The institution's social media content is targeted at the for diasporas community. Because the current crisis is run by diasporas, the institution addresses the interests and ideas of the government. However, the community living in the region gets information through the mainstream media.

The result indicates that the institution has a reactive role during the crisis and is working on the response of the diaspora community. Therefore, the institution is not focused on its own role and responsibility; rather, it is focused on a counterpropaganda communication system.

The other participants stated that the Amhara communication bureau has professional media experts who run online media activity, and the media experts have taken media training.

There are highly talented and qualified media professionals in the institute. This group was formed considering the current crisis. We are professional experts; we are trained in Media Literacy. Additionally, we have completed various media training courses, and as a group, we have gone through each other's training 4-5 times (SP1 & SP2, May 02/2024).

The result indicates that the Amhara Communication Bureau has professional journalists and media experts to run social media activities online. However, each interview's data has a different perspective. The interviewee stated that the institution has professional journalists and media experts, and the practices are different from the profession that focuses on counterattack communication systems.

The results of the data show that the Amhara Communication Bureau sees and monitors the institution's social media website. The institution's social media has its own system to know how many views its website has. However, the institutions have closed the comment box and rejected the feedback of the public.

We close the comment box to important information, because the militant group goes against culture and norms and posts its own propaganda in the comment box, and reflects

its own position, and opening the comment box is closed, because it is not useful for the government. We are the government's interviewers, and we only operate one-way communication or only provide information; the institution does not need comments (TL1 May 02/2024).

The result indicates that the institution follows only a one-way communication method using a social media platform to disseminate and convey to the public. The institution doesn't give feedback to the public.

However, in a contrasting way, other participants stated that the Amhara Communication Bureau gives feedback on the comments when it distributes them on social media platforms.

“The institution is monitoring the comments, and if there is a problem, we will fix it with another idea. We will run another report if it needs feedback or needs to be fixed” (PR3 April 30 /2024)

The two opposite responses of the study participants indicate that employees of the organization have different understandings of the usage of social media, particularly the way of giving feedback to the public during a crisis. This implies that the Amhara communication bureau has a lack of internal communication, poor communication, and a weak communication crisis structure.

4.3.6 Feedback

4.3.6.1 A way of checking the information

The Amhara Communication Bureau disseminates various public information about the crisis. Therefore, the researcher asked the study participants how they knew the extent of the information's reach to the public. According to the participants, the institution's Facebook page has 3700000 followers, and the public has given 1500 thousand comments, and 15 to 20 news articles are uploaded daily. According to the Participants of the study, the institution is reaching the public through various channels, and the institution has checked the accessibility of the information. Therefore, according to the result, the Amhara Communication Bureau followed the delivery of information on the media channel.

On the other hand, the institution knows that the delivery of information to the public by the organizational structure is from the regional communication bureau to the districts. Therefore, the public doesn't have a problem with information about the current crisis

As the institution, if the information is given to the people in the form of press releases, there is a department that collects public opinion; however, this department is not active during the current crisis. Therefore, instead of this department, we collect daily and weekly information from the public in the zone and district communication structure, and they bring it to the region. The other methods we know the information that was informed the public by seeing social media pages' comments" (PR1, April 30, 2024).

The result indicates that the institution used different systems. Although the bureau has its own department to collect feedback from the public, it's not active during times of crisis. This clearly indicates that the institution is weak in communicating the ongoing crisis.

However, the other participant stated a contrasting idea

We know that we have prepared a short questionnaire in a location where there is relative peace, and we are confident that we can reach the public (PR3 April 30/2024).

The two participants of the study imply two opposite ideas about the reach of information to the public, implying a lack of institutional understanding and weak internal communication in the organizations.

On the other hand, the participant stated that the institution has a lot of followers; therefore, the public can get information on the institution's social media page.

We understand that the messages we share will reach the public because the website has a lot of followers. The leaders of the current crisis are the elite and the diasporas. So those people have gotten our information from the institution's social media page. We have a system to see the people institution's social media page (SP1 May 02 /2024).

The result shows that the Amhara communication has no clear assessment method to know its own transmission of information. Additionally, the participants have different understandings. The

institution used to guess that the public could get information. They believe that the information the institute shares will reach the public because the institute has many Facebook followers.

4.3.6.2 Way of managing Negative and positive comments during crisis time

The participants of the study stated that Amhara communication disseminates information through different media about the crisis. The researcher asked how the Amhara communication bureau manages the comments of the public.

The participant stated that the Amhara communication bureau's social media page, particularly the Facebook page comment box, is closed.

The comment box is closed because it is not useful for the government. The extremists disseminate their own propaganda in the comment section of the institution's website, as it has a large following. We also do not give feedback on the comments given; it is not our concern that the comment given is because it is propaganda of the enemy” (TL1 & SP1, May 02 /, 2024).

However, in a contrasting way, the other participant of the study stated that the institution applied two-way communication in the crisis of the Amhara region conflict.

We monitor and evaluate the social media ideas issued by different sectors, as well as zone and district structures. We give feedback by identifying what kind of issues were socio-political or economic issues, and if there is a need for a government press release, we will make the government issue a statement or add them to the agenda for discussion (PR2 May 02 /2024).

The Amhara Communication Bureau does not provide institutions with reliable guidance on managing comments on social media content. Most participants in this study said that the Amhara Communication Bureau doesn't provide feedback on comments, and the institution's social media comments box is closed. However, some results show that the institution gives feedback to the public during times of crisis. These contradictory responses from employees of the Amhara Communication Bureau regarding feedback to social media comments indicate a lack of coordination and shared understanding of social media policy in the institution.

4.4 Challenges of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau

The researcher asked the participants of this study about the challenges of communication activity during a crisis in the Amhara region. According to the respondents, different challenges are faced during the current crisis in the region.

4.4.1 The challenges of perception

4.4.1.1 Role from own

The Amhara communication bureau employees have different understandings of the communication responsibilities regarding the Amhara region crisis.

The current crisis is a political question, and the question will be resolved in a discussion at the highest political level. Therefore, all parties, namely the government and the armed forces, can resolve political issues through a political forum. Our job is to convey the idea of government through the crisis to the public. We are a bridge between the government and the people, but not a political bridge (PR3 April 30 /2024).

This implies that the institution is only transmitting information from the government to the public and follows a one-way communication system. The result shows that the institution acts as a carrier, not a bridge. This suggests that institutions are unclear about their own role, which has been a persistent issue.

Other participants stated that the challenges of the communication bureau are that the interests of government and institutional workers are different about the solution to the crisis.

“We have different views about the crisis between the government and our experts. Because the institution experts want the government to attack the enemy face-to-face, and the war will stop in a short time,” (SP2 May 02/ 2024).

According to the data, the institution employees have different understandings of the crisis of the Amhara region; some believe that the institution is not responsible for solving the problem, while others believe that the main challenge of the institution is the prolonged war and the action of the Amhara Communication Bureau about the crisis.

Another participant stated that there is a big difference in understanding between the government and the armed groups about the crisis of the Amhara region, the extremist group's unwillingness to talk and negotiate.

“The armed group is thinking that they can solve a problem with a gun rather than solving it with talking has become a serious problem” (PR1, April 30, 2024).

The result indicates that perceptions of individuals are a challenge to crisis communication in the Amhara region.

4.4.2 Lack of Public Acceptance

4.4.2.1 Sided

The participants stated that the public has always found it unacceptable to classify the institution as a government.

The public assumes that the institution is seen by the people as only conveying the ideas of the government. However, the community knows the truth and does not support the government. The public is often a dreamer who only hears what they want to hear and tends to prioritize personal interests. Additionally, society faces issues with confusion caused by listening to rumors from extremists (PR1, April 30, 2024).

This finding suggested that the public perceived that the institution is the mouthpiece of the government rather than an independent institution to practice two-way communication. This understanding may influence public trust in the institution.

4.4.2.2 Denial

The result the government does not acknowledge the problems and does not work to solve the crisis in the Amhara region. The statements of the government aggravate the war, and government statements create confusion among the public, which is another challenge of institutional communication. The government's failure to acknowledge the problem, apologize, and clearly declare the seriousness of the crisis has only exacerbated the problem. The result implies that the Amhara Communication Bureau is rejecting responsibility or refusing to acknowledge the crisis.

4.4.2.3 Short-term outcomes

The participant stated that the Amhara Communication Bureau is working on a persuasion mind activity. The public in the region believes that the Amhara Communication Bureau is not engaging in any activities. The public wants visible and measurable change from the institution, which has become an obstacle to communication. This implies that, unlike other institutions, it does not have results that can be expressed in numbers or percentages.

Therefore, the result shows that the institution does not show tangible impacts during the crisis time. Simply passing information from top to bottom during a crisis does not create effective crisis communication.

4.4.3 State of emergency and Security problem

All participants stated that the Amhara region is in a state of emergency, and the institution experts cannot conduct communication activities in the region.

The administration of the region under the state of emergency and the existence of an administrative hierarchy impose restrictions on the institutions' work to manage the current crisis in the region. Additionally, the region is leaving out the formal government system and being led by the military system, which challenges communication activity in the institution. Additionally, due to security concerns, the safety of the institution's employees across the regional and district structures cannot be ensured.

The result indicates that the region is in a state of emergency, leading the communications system to be government- and military-oriented. This creates one-way communication from top to bottom within the institution.

4.4.4 Lack of infrastructure

The Participants mentioned that the destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of institutions, and the shutdown of the internet have hampered communication during the crisis. The employees cannot collect the public's opinion about the current crisis in the region. Therefore, the institution cannot conduct research about the crisis. The finding implies that Effective crisis communication needs a full infrastructure. Lack of infrastructure and internet led to one-way communication

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Discussion and implications

This study examined how the Amhara Communications Bureau communicated the current crisis of the region. The study has three main objectives and was conducted through interviews and using the institution's social media news reports. The main objective of the study is to assess the role of the Amhara Communication Bureau, how it communicates the crisis, and what is the challenges the institution faces during times of crisis. The results of the study were organized into different teams to answer the main objectives of the study. Among the teams of the study that present the results are when the perception of beginning times of the current crisis and conflict in the Amhara region, the reasons why the crisis was not solved in a short time, how the institution delivers information to the public during a crisis, and how the bureau communicates the current levels of crisis. Furthermore, the researcher organized the team to discuss the usage of media during the crisis time. Therefore, the Amhara communication bureau, media relations of mainstream media during the current crisis, social media usage and monitoring during the current crisis, Feedback of the institution, A way of checking the information, and Negative and positive comments during crisis time. Additionally, challenges are the main objective of the study, and the researcher organized a team about challenges of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau.

The first team of the study focused on the institution's perception of the beginning of the current crisis and conflict in the Amhara region. The findings indicate that employees of the institution do not share a common view about when the crisis began in the region. Some believe the region is headed toward a crisis in April 2023, coinciding with the dissolution of the regional special force. Conversely, others point out that the crisis started in July 2023 after the two forces engaged in a gunfight. Although the findings recognize conflict in various parts of the region, the institution's employees agreed that before August 2023, different ideas led to conflict, and various signs of conflict were already visible. Even though the Amhara Communications Bureau observed many signs of conflict before the crisis in the region, the institution did not take any action to resolve the situation quickly. However, Coombs & Holladay (2014) describe a crisis as an unpredictable event that can significantly impact an organization's performance, produce negative outcomes, and threaten key stakeholder expectations. Although scholars argue that crises occur unexpectedly and

suddenly, the study findings show that the crisis in the Amhara region is ongoing and has developed over time. Therefore, the findings indicate that the Amhara Communication Bureau played a passive role in preventing the crisis. Additionally, the findings reveal a lack of coordinated communication within the institution during the crisis. Tetteh (2020) stated that poor coordination can lead to the loss of important information and increase risks. As a result of poor communication within the institution, the regional conflict escalated, leading to many casualties.

Overall, the finding indicates that there is no pre-crisis communication plan in the Amhara communication bureau. However, Coombs (2011) states that during the pre-crisis period of a crisis, members of the organization should take all reasonable precautions to prevent crises as well as be ready for them should they arise. During crisis times, plans for crisis communication are essential for collecting and distributing information quickly, accurately, and specifically. Scholars also state that a crisis communication plan provides a strategic advantage that helps prevent and reduce the negative effects of crises (Todarita & Ranf, 2009). Additionally, SCCT suggests that pre-crisis communication can lead to better crisis management, including damage limitation for corporate reputation. However, the Amhara Communication Bureau was not prepared to prevent the crisis in the Amhara region. This study shares the same findings as previous research, *An Assessment of Crisis Communication Practices and Challenges: The Case of the Federal Police Commission* (Gebremedhin, 2020). The previous study indicates that the Federal Police Commission has no crisis communication strategy to implement during critical situations. Similarly, the current study's findings clearly show that the Amhara Communication Bureau did not practice pre-crisis communication in the Amhara region conflict.

Additionally, this study finding is similar to the study that was conducted on Risk Communication in the Fight Against Cholera Outbreak: The Case of Amhara National Regional State Health Bureau (Ali, 2020). The finding highlighted that the Bureau generally did not use risk communication. Before the pandemic, the Bureau was found to have no risk plan at all. Although the study was conducted on risk communication, the two studies are related to each other in terms of sensitive cases and communication.

The other team highlighted why the crisis was not managed quickly. The study's main findings show that the federal government was involved in the institution's work, and the institution did not have a pre-crisis communication plan when the crisis started. Additionally, the region was under

the control of the command post, and it was difficult to prevent the crisis. Therefore, the results indicate that the communication bureau was not self-managed; instead, it waited for government permission and served as a mouthpiece for the government, functioning as a propaganda tool. This also led the office to adopt a reactive rather than a proactive role in the conflict in the Amhara region. The scholar stated that proactive management functions, such as public relations monitoring trends and issues, provide benefits during crises and serve as facilitators and mediators between the organization and its public (Luhukay, 2008). According to the scholar, proactive preparation, open communication, transparency, and understanding are the key elements of effective crisis communication because they create an environment conducive to handling organizational difficulties and maintaining stakeholder confidence (Mwandembo, 2024). Additionally, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory suggests that proactive pre-crisis communication strategies can improve crisis management and reduce harm to the organization's reputation. However, the real practice of crisis communication in the Amhara Communication Bureau is different from the scholar's idea. The communication practices of the institution were restricted by the government, and the institution did not have a plan to manage the crisis in the Amhara region conflict.

Furthermore, this study explains why the crisis was not managed early; the region is unsafe, which makes mobility restrictions and communication challenges difficult for the institution's activities during the crisis. Additionally, the institution has been involved in various activities alongside the government. Its work mostly aligns with government communication strategies, including promoting security and peace narratives, highlighting government projects, and spreading official announcements. The findings show that the institution did not operate in a balanced way, suggesting it functions more as an institutional communicator rather than a mediator between the government and the community. However, other research emphasizes that public relations should be communicated in a balanced way during a crisis. Urinbayeva (2025) stated that instead of simply serving as an institutional communicator, public relations should act as a mediator between the community and the government by fostering communication and resolving disputes. Therefore, the practice of the communication bureau is the other face of the government. Other findings indicate that armed groups intentionally refuse peace negotiations and prefer to continue armed conflict. Consequently, the institution officially informed the public that its use of hard power was aimed at resolving the crisis in the region. The institution was going with the plan of FANO

militants rather than using various communication options. This shows that the institution is weak and ineffective in times of crisis.

The findings also reveal that the Amhara Communication Bureau's communication practices are mainly aligned with government interests, resulting in a top-down approach rather than a participatory one. The Amhara Communication Bureau was working on a government mouthpiece that transmitted the plan and interests of the government. The institution's one-way communication method directly supports the scholar's argument; top management does not support or promote participatory approaches, and communication during crises is often top-down rather than participatory (Heide & Simonsson, 2021).

On the other hand, the finding shows that the government believes that the crisis has ended using hard power. Therefore, it quickly shared the news of its victory with the public to gain their support. The communication bureau continually informs the campaign about the government's attacks and controls the region using force. This shows that crisis communication remains centered on institutions, relies on operational methods, and features limited participatory interaction. However, the Amhara Communication Bureau employed various techniques, focusing on delivering information to the public during a crisis. The findings show that the bureau often uses different media platforms to share information in a one-way method. During a crisis, the institution proposed using social media, particularly Facebook, as the primary platform to share timely information with the public. The scholar supported that, during times of crisis, public relations use social media as a tool for relationship management and efficient communication (Babatunde, 2022). Therefore, social media is the main media platform for disseminating information about the crisis in the Amhara Communication Bureau.

Furthermore, the institution works with government structures in the zones and districts' communication centers to share the government's interests and statements. However, its communication is mostly one-way or top-down, reactive, focusing on providing information while limiting public participation, influence, and participatory peacebuilding. The finding aligns with the press agency model of public relations. According to Tench & Yeomans (2009), the press agency approach is a one-way flow of communication, with the main objective of promoting a particular worldview through the media, among other channels, without engaging in dialogue with

the audience. Therefore, the way the Amhara Communication Bureau disseminates information to the public is one-way, top-down methods.

Additionally, the finding shows that the Amhara Communication Bureau is acting as the government's mouthpiece during the crisis. However, the institution thinks it is serving as a bridge between the public and the government during the crisis; however, the study results reveal a gap between the bureau's intended role and its actual practice during times of crisis. The finding shows that crisis communication is implemented in the institution; however, it is institution-centered and prioritizes government narratives over participatory communication. Therefore, the bureau's activity is working on a carrier of government propaganda rather than a bridge. However, scholars state that during a crisis, a lack of participatory communication damages organizational credibility, spreads rumors, and undermines confidence (David 2011). Therefore, the research data shows that the public does not trust the institution during the Amhara region conflict.

Within the Amhara Regional Bureau's communication team, current crisis levels indicate that the bureau's intentional agenda-setting aims to influence public opinion by spreading government propaganda and highlighting progress. However, the region is facing a crisis, indicating that the government's control over communication is limited and ineffective in conflict situations. Additionally, findings show inadequate preparedness during the crisis and a lack of an independent, public-facing communication system. This poor communication during conflict reflects institutional limitations and security dominance, leading to information gaps, reduced public confidence, and hindering crisis management. Meanwhile, the institution is working on shaping the government's image. The findings align with the press agency model of public relations, which uses one-way communication to promote and publicize the organization to enhance its reputation (Wahyudi, 2023).

The crisis communication of the Amhara Communication Bureau is top-down, delivering information from the government to the public. Although scholars state that to minimize harm and manage crises, effective top-down communication during emergencies requires leaders to communicate clearly, prepare, develop communication plans, and coordinate messaging (Tetteh, 2020). However, the government spreads its own propaganda and interests to the public through various media channels. The finding shows that during a crisis; the media relations team of the Amhara Communication Bureau has strong ties with various media outlets in the region.

Therefore, the media plays a crucial role in crisis communication. A proactive, open approach to developing relationships with the media is crucial for successful outcomes, fostering a mutually beneficial partnership between public relations and media during times of crisis (Obasi, 2024).

As a result, the Amhara Communication Bureau used both mainstream and social media platforms to share information during the crisis. The institution holds monthly meetings with officials from various mainstream media outlets, called the media forum. The findings show that the institution has significant authority to decide on media content and plays a central role in the media. The bureau organizes a monthly media forum led by officials from the institution. This official-centered communication approach suggests that the bureau's role is more focused on distributing information rather than strategic public relations. However, as scholars stated, effective crisis management requires a focus on strategic public relations because it involves timely communication, transparency, and proactive engagement, which are more effective than simply disseminating information (Albert et al., 2024).

Generally, the study findings indicate that the communication system of the Amhara Communication Bureau primarily depends on one-way communication, and the institution has a controlling communication system by setting an agenda and evaluating content. Additionally, the government represents the Media officials, who are political figures who can be easily controlled within this communication framework.

The other finding of the study shows that the Amhara Communication Bureau's social media use and monitoring during the current crisis are reactive and mainly focus on the diaspora community. The institution thinks the leadership of the Amhara region conflict involves the elite and diaspora communities; therefore, its primary purpose on social media is to respond to the diaspora and elite communities about the crisis. Like other communication systems, the social media platform operates on a one-way communication system. Findings indicate that the bureau used social media to convey government interests and propaganda to the public. On the other hand, another finding shows that the Amhara Communication Bureau used a two-way communication system to provide feedback on comments when they are shared on social media. However, these contrasting findings reveal that the institution's practitioners have different understandings and experiences of social media usage, especially regarding how to give feedback during a crisis. This suggests that the bureau experiences a lack of internal communication, poor organizational communication, and an

ineffective communication structure. Similarly, the study finding is directly related to the characteristics of poor internal communication during a crisis, including unequal formal communication, lack of leadership, weak organizational culture, and absence of shared values, which can lead to an organizational crisis through external stakeholder involvement (Kukule, 2013). The study assessed how the bureau verifies information; the institution recognizes that data is delivered directly to the public and employs various techniques. The findings show that although the bureau has a dedicated department that collects public feedback, it has been inactive during this crisis. Conversely, other findings indicate that the bureau used questionnaires and gathered public feedback to assess the reach of its information.

The findings indicate that the Amhara communication bureau has conflicting views about how information reaches the public; it reveals a lack of institutional understanding and weak internal communication within the organization. Therefore, the study finding similarly to Risk Communication in the Fight Against Cholera Outbreak: The Case of Amhara National Regional State Health Bureau (Ali 2020), the study findings indicate that the bureau has a poor understanding of the concept of risk communication.

Sørensen & et al (2022) argued that due to ambiguity in employees' roles and duties, employees interpret organizational crises differently, resulting in informal communication and understanding. Consequently, the Amhara communication bureau lacks a unified institutional framework. Regarding the management of both positive and negative comments about the institution's media content during a crisis, the study's findings indicate that the institution acts as a mouthpiece for the government, spreading government propaganda to the public. As a result, the institution's comment box has been closed. However, other findings show that the institution has monitored comments and provided feedback to the public during the crisis. The contradictory findings regarding feedback on social media comments suggest a lack of coordination and a shared understanding of social media policy within the institution. Although scholars argue that public relations is crucial to crisis management, especially when addressing how social media amplifies disasters through comment responses and effective control (Oliveira, 2007), the main role of the communication bureau during the Amhara region conflict was to distribute information to the public in a one-way manner. The study's findings are similar to those of Ali (2020). It has been discovered that the Bureau lacks a systematic way to gather audience feedback.

Regarding the challenges faced by the Amhara Communication Bureau during times of crisis, the findings show that the institution experienced various issues. The study indicates that perception is one of the main challenges for the Amhara Communication Bureau during crisis times. Employees within the institution hold different views about the crisis in the Amhara region; some believe that the Amhara Communication Bureau is not responsible for solving the problem, while others see the main challenge as the differing interests of government officials and institutional workers regarding the solution to the crisis. Additionally, there is a gap in understanding between the government and armed groups about the crisis in the Amhara region, with militant groups unwilling to engage in talks or negotiations.

Additionally, the public perceives the institution as constantly siding with the government. The variation in stakeholder perceptions arises from the challenges faced by the communication bureau during a crisis. Different stakeholders have their own interpretations of the crisis, making it hard to manage. Scholars agree that, due to various economic, social, political, and cultural factors, public perceptions influence crisis communication, resulting in a range of reactions and challenges in acceptance (Littlefield, 2013). Therefore, the findings indicate that the Amhara communication bureau lacks a unified guideline for its employees during times of crisis.

This suggests that the public views the institution as the government's mouthpiece rather than an independent body capable of practicing two-way communication. Consequently, this perception may affect public trust and result in bias. Therefore, the findings align with the press agency model of public relations: communication primarily reflects the government's interests. The one-way Press Agency/Publicity Model, which is common in public organizations, may be less effective in crisis management due to bureaucratic constraints and limited two-way communication (Eyo & Onyebuchi, 2025).

Denial is another challenge faced by the Amhara Communication Bureau during times of crisis. The study's findings show that the government often denies responsibility or refuses to acknowledge the crisis. This aligns with the principle, which involves rejecting responsibility for an emergency. According to the SCCT deny approach, it aims to dissociate an institution from the disaster by denying any accountability. The Amhara Communication Bureau employed this denial approach to protect political interests and maintain power. The focus on short-term public perception highlights the challenges of effective crisis communication in the region. The findings

indicate that the bureau's practice does not produce meaningful results; it merely passes information from top to bottom during a crisis, failing to establish effective communication. Scholars support that simply passing information down is not enough for crisis communication; two-way messaging is more effective than one-sided communication (Kim & Sung, 2014). As a result, the institution's efforts have gradually lost public trust. According to SCCT, prioritizing public safety during emergencies is a crucial strategy for managing reputation and reducing negative opinions, as it aligns with safeguarding public safety over protecting institutional image (Maulida, 2021). Although the scholars argued that during a crisis, public safety is the priority activity in communication, in a contrasting way, the practice of the Amhara communication bureau during the Amhara region conflict was protecting only the government's image.

Security problems and a state of emergency are the main challenges faced by the Amhara communication bureau during a crisis. The findings reveal that one-way communication, focused on government images and propaganda, primarily aims to maintain the government's political stability rather than promote mutual understanding. This aligns with the press agency model of public relations. During crisis time, the press agency model of public relations ignores feedback and only distributes information to the public.

Besides security issues, the destruction and loss of infrastructure pose significant challenges to crisis communication within the Amhara Communication Bureau. The findings indicate that a lack of infrastructure results in one-way communication. Similarly, Harnesk (2014) emphasized that A lack of infrastructure may hinder crisis response attempts and restrict access to vital information.

CHAPTER SIX

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Summary

This study examined the crisis communication practices of the Amhara communication bureau during the conflict between FANO and government forces in the Amhara region. The study focused on the first phase of six months after the crisis began, from August 2023 to January 2024. A qualitative research approach is employed, including in-depth interviews with the organization's employees and qualitative content analysis of the organization's news during the crisis period.

The research findings address the research questions outlined in the first chapter of this study. All questions are answered and analyzed using a scientific research methodology. This study discussed the interview data and qualitative content analysis, supported by the researcher's arguments and previous studies.

Therefore, the research finding shows that the Amhara Communication Bureau plays a central role in disseminating information during the crisis. The communication system is one-way and lacks public dialogue, rather than being two-way. In most communication practices, the bureau releases official statements by controlling the media through top-down communication systems. Most communication methods are one-sided, focusing more on counterpropaganda communication than on discussion or public involvement. The bureau's role is to act as the government's mouthpiece and to carry governmental information during the crisis. Additionally, the study findings indicate that during the crisis, the institution did not operate on its own plan of communication strategies but operated with the permission of the command post in the region. Therefore, the bureau had a passive role in preventing the crisis in the early times. The study found that the Amhara Communication Bureau mainly informed the public about the current crisis through media releases and official statements. However, instead of managing the crisis, the institution exacerbated it by issuing different provocative statements. Therefore, the bureau played an escalatory role in the Amhara region conflict.

The other main objective of the study was to assess the Amhara Communication Bureau's Crisis communication practices during the Amhara region conflict. Therefore, the study findings show that the institution established a social media group and regularly posted statements about the

government's overall activities, interests, propaganda, and victories during the conflict across various media outlets. During the crisis, the institution did not operate on its own plan and instructions but instead acted with the permission of the command post in the region. However, the bureau tried to work on different activities, including setting agendas and taking steps to resolve the regional conflict, including bringing the issue to federal ministers and arranging visits to districts to talk with residents. Additionally, the findings show that the institution engaged in official communication during the crisis, with the regional president and the head of the communication office visiting conflict zones and participating in discussions. However, the finding shows that most communication methods were one-way, providing few opportunities for public participation or feedback.

In the conflict, the bureau used different communication channels based on the target audience. Social media platforms mainly reached the diaspora community and external audiences, while mainstream media outlets targeted the local community. Nevertheless, the communication system remained primarily one-way, with the bureau focusing on information dissemination. The findings align more with the PR role of the press agency model than a symmetrical approach. Additionally, the findings suggest that the bureau followed a denial strategy of SCCT. The institution believed and argued that there is no crisis in the region; therefore, rather than recognizing the crisis and apologizing, the institution reflects the government's victory. Therefore, the practice of the communication bureau is working on government image protection rather than crisis management.

On the other hand, the institution thinks it was working to bring peace between the two warring parties; however, the message it conveys is controversial and based on the ideas and desires of the government. The contrasting findings indicate that the communication bureau does not have a general crisis communication rule.

Regarding the challenges faced by the Amhara Communication Bureau in crisis communication, the study findings show that the office has encountered several significant obstacles. These include the declaration of a state of emergency, strict military government restrictions that hinder its ability to carry out its communication strategy, and the government's denial of problems. The failure to acknowledge, address, and apologize has worsened the conflict. Additionally, the findings show other crisis communication challenges in the Amhara communication bureau within the bureau, such as perception issues. There is controversy over whether the institution's employees understand

their roles well. Sometimes, the office acts as the government's mouthpiece, while at other times, it serves as a bridge for public relations. Overall, the bureau's crisis communication has been less effective due to these issues, resulting in centralized, one-way communication and limited public engagement.

Additionally, security concerns of employees, the lack of infrastructure, internet access, and the public's short-term needs mean that there is very little understanding of the institution's work among the community, which poses a challenge to communication practices during the crisis in the Amhara region.

6.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that the Amhara communication bureau had a passive role in disseminating information through one-way communication. The bureau followed a one-way communication model and transmitted government agendas during the Amhara region conflict.

The Amhara Communication Bureau's practiced crisis communication efforts included various public discussions with politicians at all levels. However, these were mostly one-sided, focused on conveying government goals rather than engaging with ordinary citizens. Additionally, the target audience for the information the bureau shared through the media was diverse, including both local communities and the diaspora. However, the institution's social media had restricted engagement. Moreover, the institution lacks internal communication strategies, and inconsistent employee perceptions of their roles highlight the absence of a cohesive strategic communication plan during the crisis. The communication bureau's activity simply acted as another face of government during the crisis.

Additionally, the study findings show that during crises, the communication institution was controlled by the political system. Furthermore, during the crisis, military rule completely changed the direction of the communication system. Therefore, the Amhara Communication Bureau did not practice any crisis communication activities to resolve the crisis. This study concludes that the Amhara Communication Bureau lacks clear work guidelines, proper regulations, and a unified institutional framework. Additionally, the lack of proper regulation of communication institutions and government interference makes it hard to manage the crisis during conflict. The institution

used counterargument communication with segmented audiences on social media, which tends to be a response to hate, rather than engaging in effective problem-solving communication. The study also concluded that one-sided communication during a crisis reduces the credibility of communication institutions. Overall, Ethiopian communication institutions have not organized communication flows in times of crisis.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed

- ☐ The Amhara Communication Bureau should improve the proactive communication approach rather than the reactive one
- ☐ The bureau should practice two-way communication systems
- ☐ The bureau should have communication strategies, specifically pre-crisis, during crisis, and post-crisis communication plans for a crisis.
- ☐ The bureau should provide training and awareness to the employees about their own roles
- ☐ The bureau should have an information archive that is disseminated in the media
- ☐ The bureau should know its own work

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department Participants

1. What were the pre-emptive and coordinated efforts made by the Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department regarding the current situation before the conflict broke out?

- When did the conflict begin?
- Did you provide information about the conflict to the public in an appropriate and timely manner?

2. What coordinated work has the Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department performed to resolve the crisis from the start of the war in August 2015 E.C until now?

3. What coordinated work has the Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department performed to manage the crisis since it began to escalate?

4. Which information dissemination methods does the Amhara Communications Bureau use to distribute information to the public?

- Does the information transmission method you use accurately reach the public?
- How do you know that the information has reached the public?
- Do you conduct survey studies?

5. Does the Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department monitor the bureau's social media pages?

- Do you evaluate the content posted on the page? Do you ensure feedback is given on the page?

6. How is the Amhara Communications Bureau Public Relations Department currently delivering information to the public during the crisis?

- Is the conflict currently resolved? What does the post-conflict recovery process look like? What specific actions have been taken?

7. Does the Amhara Communication Bureau have a current strategic plan to address the ongoing crisis in the region?

8. Is the Bureau effectively communicating the current situation to the public? If not, why?

- Who is your primary target audience for this information?
- Are you conducting any research or assessments?
- What kind of feedback are you receiving from the community?

9. What is the main obstacle to resolving the ongoing conflict between government forces and armed groups through dialogue?

- What efforts have been made to bring the government and armed forces to the negotiating table?
- Has the federal government been asked for assistance in resolving the conflict?
- Why has total peace not yet been restored to the region?

APPENDIX B

Questions for Participants from the Amhara Communication Bureau Social Media Department

1. What is the information content of the Amhara Communication Bureau's social media Facebook page?
2. Who is the target audience for the information content on the Amhara Communication Bureau's social media Facebook page?
 - Does it reach the relevant audience accurately and on time?
 - There is no internet; therefore, how does the information reach the community within the region?
 - In this situation, how is peace maintained?
3. How much Facebook information reaches the community daily through the social media website?
 - By day? By week? By month? In numbers?
4. What kind of information does the Amhara Communication Bureau's social media Facebook page consistently deliver to the community?

5. How many followers does the Amhara Communication Bureau's Facebook page have?
How many of them provide feedback after seeing the shared information on the Facebook page?

6. Who monitors the Amhara Communication Bureau's social media Facebook website?

- Does it provide appropriate responses to the comments given by the community?

7. What work has the Amhara Communication Bureau social media department done to manage the current crisis?

- Have you provided essential information to the community beforehand, or did you start verifying information only after the conflict began?

8. What is the primary challenge for the Amhara Communication Bureau social media department in controlling the current crisis?

- Do you work in coordination with professionals operating at the Zonal and Woreda (district) levels?

- Are there qualified professionals who have received various training courses in the media sector?

- Do you have internet access?

- How do you know that people are unable to see the information posted on the website?

APPENDIX C

Ethical Clearance



**Bahir Dar University
Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Review Committee**

Annex 3
Form: BDU/FoH 03

FoHRERC'S Decision
Meeting No.: FoH/RERC/03/2024 Date (D/M/Y): 01/04/2024
Proposal number 04 Assigned No.: 004

Proposal title: Examine the Practice of Crisis Communication in Amhara Communication Bureau: The Case of the Conflict between Fano and the Government Force			
Name of (Principal) investigator: Areyam Enyew			
Institution of (principal) investigator: Bahir Dar University			
Version of elements reviewed	Proposal version:	Attached :	☒ yes ☐ No
	Consent form version:	Attached :	☒ yes ☐ No
Decision of the Committee:	Approved ☒	Resubmission ☐	Disapproved ☐
	Sent to Institutional Review Committee (IRB) ☐		
Obligations of the Principal investigator: 1. Complies with the standard international & national scientific and ethical guidelines 2. Gets FoHRERC approval for all amendments and changes required to be made in the proposal and consent form 3. Reports to Serious adverse event (SAE) within 10 days of the event 4. Reports end of the study, including manuscripts and thesis works 5. Reports non-compliance and unanticipated events			
Approval period (dd/mm/yy- dd/mm/yy):		16/04/2024 - 16/04/2025	
Follow up report expected in:	3 months	9 months	
	6 months	12 months	☒

Chair Person: Adem Chanle (PhD)

Date 16/04/2024 **Signature**

