

WERABE UNIVERSITY COLLAGE OF HUNMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF POLITICAL CHANGE ON THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GOVERNMENTS COMMUNICATION OF ETHIOPIA

THESIS SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTERS DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION (MA)

By

KALID AWELL

(Reg. No.PRR/008/14)

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

Dr. GETACHEW TILAHUN

Associate Professor

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MR. SADIK

WERABE, ETHIOPIA

April, 2024



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DECLARATION

I **KALID AWELL** hereby declare that the thesis, entitled "**THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF POLITICAL CHANGE ON THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GOVERNMENTS COMMUNICATION OF ETHIOPIA**" submitted to the Department of Journalism And Communication, Werabe University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF **PUBLIC RELATION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION**, is a record of original research work done by me during 2015(E.C), under the supervision and guidance of Dr. GETACHEW TILAHUN, and it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree Diploma / Associate ship / Fellowship or other similar title of any candidate of any university.

Place: Werabe

Date:

Signature of the Candidate

ADVISOR APPROVAL SHEET

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis, entitled "**THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF POLITICAL CHANGE ON THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GOVERNMENTS COMMUNICATION OF ETHIOPIA**" submitted to the Department of Journalism And Communication, Werabe University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF **PUBLIC RELATION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION** is a record of original research work done by **KALID AWELL** during the period 2014-2016(E.C) under my supervision and guidance and the thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associate ship / Fellowship or other similar title of any candidate of any University and it complies with the regulation and accepted standards of the university.

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WERABE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HUNMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

EPRDF	ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC FRONT
GCAO	GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AFFAIRS OFFICE
MOI	MINSTERY OF INFORMATION
PR	PUBLIC RELATION

ABSTRACT

The study investigates how shifts in the political landscape influence the practice of public relations (PR) within government communication of Ethiopia, a country with a complex political history that has seen significant shifts from a feudal autocracy, through a socialist regime, to a federal democratic republic. These political transformations have had profound implications for the practice of PR in Ethiopia, particularly within the realm of government communication, has undergone significant transformations amidst the country's dynamic political landscape. This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with purposive sampling of seven key informants, including government communication officials, PR practitioners, and political affiliations. These interviews provided rich, contextual insights into the evolving nature of PR practices in response to political shifts. The quantitative component consisted of a survey distributed to a sample of 100 PR professionals in government communication, federal ministries and agencies, aimed at quantifying the extent of changes observed in PR practices. The findings revealed that political transitions have significantly influenced public relations practices in Ethiopian government communication. A shift towards more transparent, inclusive, and participatory public relations practices has been observed, emphasizing digital media utilization, public engagement, and the strategic role of public relations. The quantitative data further corroborated the qualitative insights, indicating that political changes have had a positive impact on the practice of public relations in government communication. Respondents reported increased transparency, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and a greater emphasis on digital communication strategies in the wake of political transitions. The shift towards more participatory and transparent PR practices is seen as a response to the public's demand for greater accountability and the need for the government to build trust with its citizens. Additionally, the research delves into the operational aspects of public relations management within government communication structures, highlighting the multifaceted nature of public relations practices in Ethiopia. Overall, this study contributes

to the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the impact of political change on public relations in Ethiopia. The findings underscore the importance of continuous training and education for public relations practitioners to navigate environmental shifts effectively. By emphasizing the evolving landscape of public relations in government communication, the research offers valuable insights for enhancing communication strategies during periods of political transitions. The study concludes that adapting to political changes is crucial for the effectiveness of PR practices in government communication, and it highlights the need for ongoing professional development to equip PR practitioners with the skills necessary to manage these transitions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The discipline of public relations (PRs) stands as a dynamic and evolving field, deeply intertwined with the socio-political fabric of societies worldwide. While its origins can be traced back to ancient civilizations, its modern incarnation has undergone significant transformation, particularly in the context of developing nations. As globalization accelerates and communication technologies advance, the practice of public relations assumes heightened importance as a strategic management function.

In delineating the evolution of PRs, it is essential to consider both historical antecedents and contemporary manifestations. Classical scholars such as Faxon Company (2018) have characterized PRs as a multifaceted discipline encompassing the management of public perceptions, formulation of organizational policies, and implementation of strategic communication initiatives. This perspective underscores the intrinsic link between PRs and organizational effectiveness, with the latter contingent upon the former's ability to navigate complex stakeholder dynamics and foster mutual understanding. Furthermore, PRs helps the management to be informed on and responsive to public opinions. As per the review of Geremew (2017), PRs emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public's interest by helping management to effectively utilize changes, to serve as an early warning system to help anticipate trends, and to use research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

Though it is not possible to find out when and where modern PRs have exactly begun in Ethiopia, there is a belief that it might have been in 1960s (Solomon, 1998, p. 20). Prior to this period, however, the beginning of newspapers that provided advertisement space for business organizations since 1900's coupled with the introduction of printing press, telecommunication and the railway by Emperor Menilik II in the late 19th century paved for the development of mass media and communications in all aspects, including the emergence of modern PRs (MoI, 2003).

As Solomon (2003) noted, the establishment of the Ministry of Pen in 1940's paved the way for the introduction of PRs in government offices. The then information and propaganda section was organized within the Ministry of Pen (MoI, 2004). Moreover, the post-World War II and the expulsion of the fascist Italian invading force brought a

need to centrally coordinate the media organizations such as radio, TV and news agency. Accordingly, those media organizations were made to be organized under the Ministry of Pen, which was later replaced by Ministry of Information and Tourism in the 1950's.

What makes the 1960s quite different is, however, according to Solomon (1998, p.23), it was a period private PRs practice came in to existence. For example, Alem public relations consultancy firm, the first of its kind, was established by the likes of Sibhat Gebreigziabher and Dereje Deressa.

However, the advent of the Derg regime in 1974 ushered in a period of authoritarian rule marked by stringent control over media and communication channels. Private public relations firms were shuttered, and state-sponsored propaganda became the norm, reflecting a coercive approach to information dissemination, Solomon Ali (2000). The suppression of political dissent and the consolidation of power under the Derg regime profoundly influenced the practice of public relations, relegating it to a tool of state propaganda rather than a conduit for dialogue and engagement with the public.

As Solomon (1998, p. 24) summarized the practice of PRs in Derg regime, stated that the media and the few government PRs units had fallen under a strict control and guidance of assigned military officers. As a result, the PRs and the media practice degenerated to the full-fledged propaganda level.

The transition to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia heralded a new era of political pluralism and institutional reform, accompanied by efforts to revitalize public relations practices. The establishment of the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) crated under the Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/2008 represented a pivotal milestone. In this regard, the Office plays a leading role in the government information and communication system, acting as a spokesperson, recording statements, and presenting the government's stand on national and international issues.

In addition, the Office is meant to serve as the main source of government information acting as government spokesperson, record government statements an disseminate them through various means, and present the stand of the government on national and international issues (as has been stated on Article 5 of the founding of GCAO, Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/ 2008, 2008). Accordingly, As observed on its website, Government Communication Affairs Office (2023), http:/ / www.gcao.gov.et/, the Office

is being directly accountable to the Prime Minister, also vested with the responsibility of setting directions for PRs activities of federal government offices and coordinates their executions.

The political history of Ethiopia demonstrates that the country has undergone a lot of social, cultural, religious, and economic changes that have witnessed its present level of development (Nigussie, 2014). In the midst of Ethiopia's diverse political landscape and the dominance of a single-party system for decades, public relations tended to lean towards propagandistic practices. However, recent political upheavals, including protests following the 2015 elections and subsequent state of emergency declarations, have reshaped the country's political and social dynamics. Moreover, the advent of digital media and social networking platforms has introduced new complexities and opportunities, reshaping the dynamics of public engagement and information dissemination, (Mohamed, 2018). Thus, changes have directly impacted both governmental and private institutions, influencing the scope and nature of public relations practices in Ethiopia.

Despite the importance of PRs during times of change and political transition, there is a noticeable lack of scientific studies that specifically address the impact of political change on the practice of PRs in Ethiopia. Previous research has emphasized the practice and role of PRs in promoting social upliftment, economic empowerment, and intercultural communication, particularly in times of political transformation. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how political changes influence the dynamics of PRs practice in government communication.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by examining the impact of political change on the practice of PRs in government communication in Ethiopia. By evaluating the role of PRs professionals, journalists, and PRs practitioners within the communication bureaus, this research seeks to shed light on the evolving landscape of PRs in the context of political transformations.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The significant role of PRs in the political process has been ubiquitous throughout history from ancient Greece and Rome to the American revolution, scholars have documented the importance of PRs and communication in politics and democracy (Broom 2009; McKinnon, Tedesco, and Lauder 2001; Wilcox & Cameron 2007).

There are imminent challenges facing many developing countries governments in the world today in their struggle for economic and social development, however. In a bid to communicate with their constituents, governments experience challenges owning to mainly with transparency and credibility issues. It can therefore be concluded the challenge for government in the 21st century is to make citizens trust government agencies (Jing, Jin et al. 2010).

Public relations (PR) in Ethiopia, particularly within the realm of government communication, remains significantly underdeveloped and inadequately integrated into strategic organizational processes. Despite its potential to enhance communication and foster a positive public image, PR is neither sufficiently recognized nor strategically managed by both practitioners and organizational managers. This deficiency in strategic engagement severely limits the effectiveness of PR in achieving organizational goals and responding to public needs, Chala (2023).

According to Chala (2023), study on the historical development and the contemporary status of public relations in Ethiopia highlights that, historically its manifestation is directly linked with indigenous communications of different communities in the country. And also observe that PR practitioners in Ethiopia are largely confined to technical roles with minimal involvement in higher-level decision-making processes, which restricts their potential strategic impact on organizational outcomes.

Mengistu and Hasen (2020) provide further evidence of this issue, revealing that in the Jimma zonal government offices, PR activities are predominantly focused on technical tasks such as publicity and public information dissemination. The study found that PR practitioners primarily operate within the confines of the two-way asymmetrical model,

emphasizing communication efforts driven by political affiliations rather than the public interest. This approach limits the capacity of PR to facilitate genuine dialogue and engagement with the public, thereby undermining its effectiveness and credibility.

Similarly, Geremew (2017) highlights that PR practices in the towns of Harar and Dire Dawa are at a rudimentary stage, characterized by propaganda, publicity, and manipulation. These practices are aligned with Grunig's first model of public relations, which emphasizes press agentry and one-way communication. This outdated model fails to leverage the potential of two-way symmetrical communication, which is essential for fostering mutual understanding and trust between organizations and their publics.

The study also underscores the practical challenges faced by PR practitioners in Ethiopia. For instance, lack sufficient budget allocations, lack of understanding and misconceptions towards the roles and functions are significant barriers that hinder the effective practice of PR, Geremew (2017). These challenges are aggravated by the political environment, which often prioritizes propaganda and controlled messaging over transparent and participatory communication. As a result, PR practitioners struggle to establish credibility and trust with the public, further diminishing the effectiveness of their efforts.

Ethiopia has undergone one of the most drastic political changes of the late 20th century. Therefore, there is a higher likelihood of political and legislative shifts in dynamic and unpredictable environments, which could prompt PRs professionals to look outside the company for answers, requiring them to actively interact with the external environment (Grunig, 2013, p.470). Thus, political history of Ethiopia demonstrates that the country has undergone a lot of social, cultural, religious, and economic changes that have witnessed its present level of development (Nigussie, 2014). Besides this, its recent year tradition of PRs practice and education allow for the study of change on practice. Results indicate PRs become more important and strategic during times of change, and while affecting change it is also affected by change.

However, much political change takes place; there were lack of scientific studies that dealt with the issue of the impact of political change on the practice of PRs in general or in Ethiopia in particular. Even though PRs are extremely important during times of change, particularly political change, despite the extensive theoretical discourse on the relationship between political systems and PR practices, there is a significant lack of

empirical studies that specifically examine the impact of political change on PR practices in Ethiopia. The existing literature predominantly addresses the role of PR in stable democracies or authoritarian regimes, neglecting the unique dynamics and challenges faced during periods of political transition in developing countries like Ethiopia. This gap in the literature highlights the need for empirical research to understand how political change influence PR practices and adapt in response to political changes.

Moreover, the current body of literature is limited by its narrow focus on the perspectives of PR practitioners within government or corporate settings. There is a clear underrepresentation of diverse perspectives, including those from PR professionals in private media, opposition parties, and civil society organizations. Including these voices could provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the PR landscape in Ethiopia, offering insights into the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by practitioners across different sectors in political landscape.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia. By examining the experiences and perspectives of PR practitioners within government communication of Ethiopia, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how political transitions influence PR practices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing more effective and strategic PR practices that can better serve the public interest and enhance organizational objectives during times of political change.

This research aims to contribute to the advancement of the PR profession in Ethiopia by identifying changes in the way PRs in government communication are practiced after the political change happened in Ethiopia. It will provide valuable insights into how PR can evolve to meet the demands of a changing political environment, ultimately enhancing the capacity of PR practitioners to contribute to the democratic process and foster a more informed and engaged public. By addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by political change, this study aims to support the development of a more robust and strategic PR practice in Ethiopia, aligned with international standards and best practices.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to assess the impact of political change on the practice of PRs in government communications of Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific objectives of the study

Specifically, the research has tried:

1) To describe the practice of PRs in government communication of Ethiopia during the rule of EPRDF.

2) To identify the changes in the way PRs in government communication are practiced after the political change happened in Ethiopia.

1.4 Research Questions

1) How is the practice of PRs in government communication of Ethiopia during the rule of EPRDF look like?

2) How does the political changes that happened in Ethiopia influence the way PRs in government communication are practiced?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of political changes on public relations practices within government communications in Ethiopia. The findings will contribute to the existing literature by offering new insights into how political dynamics influence PR strategies and practices in a transitional political context. This is particularly relevant for policymakers, public relations professionals, and scholars interested in the intersections of PR, politics, and governance.

Moreover, the study's outcomes will assist government agencies in understanding the challenges and opportunities that political changes pose to effective PR practices. This understanding can lead to the development of more robust PRs strategies that are responsive to the dynamics of political change, thereby enhancing transparency, public engagement, and governance.

1.6 Scope/Delimitation of the Study

The scope of this study is focused on the examination of the impact of the political change on the practice of PRs in government communications of Ethiopia. The study is delimited to public relations officers working in federal government agencies, as these are pivotal

in shaping the public communication strategies of the government. The geographical focus is limited to Addis Ababa, where most federal government agencies are headquartered. This delimitation is due to the concentration of political activities and media outlets in the capital, which influences the practices of public relations in government communications.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it has several limitations. The qualitative nature of the interviews may introduce subjectivity in the interpretation of the data. Although measures such as triangulation are used to enhance validity, the interpretations remain influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Additionally, the political sensitivity of the topic could affect the openness of respondents, despite assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. This might limit the depth of information shared during the interviews.

1.8 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organized into five main chapters:

Chapter 1 Introduction: This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the background, problem statement, objectives, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and synthesizes relevant literature on the impact of political changes on public relations practices.

Chapter 3 Methodology: Detailed description of the research design, data collection methods, and sampling techniques and population used in the study.

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion: Presentation and interpretation of the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study.

Chapter 5 Summery, Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter summarizes the study's findings, discusses the implications for influences of political change on PR practices, and suggests areas for further research.

Each chapter is designed to build upon the previous one, providing a coherent and comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 The Historical Development of Public Relations

The historical development of public relations can be traced back to the American Revolution in the 18th century, as stated by J. Grunig and Hunt (1984). They argue that this revolutionary movement was heavily influenced by public relations activities, making it one of the most significant occurrences in history. Cutlip et al. (2000) also support this claim, affirming that the temporary practices of public relations were shaped by innovations in mobilizing public opinion, which played a role in Revolutionary War propaganda campaigns. Benjamin Franklin, a diplomat and journalist, is highlighted by Isaacson (2003) as an early example of the integration of public relations and diplomacy in support of the American Revolution. This demonstrates the persuasive power that can be generated through such integration.

Several writers have identified key figures who contributed to the emergence of modern public relations. One of these figures is Ivy Lee, who played a significant role in managing a crisis in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914. Lee, a journalist by profession, tried his best to assist during the crisis, leading to his substantial contribution to the development of modern public relations practice. As a result, Lee is considered one of the founders of modern public relations (Seitel, 2011; Baines et al., 2004).

The 1920s brought the writings of Edward Bernays, known as the father of public relations. Bernays wrote books such as "Crystallizing Public Opinion" and "Propaganda" with the intention of shaping public opinion and influencing the public according to specific views. His goal was to achieve public relations objectives through the dissemination of cultural

ideas related to art, science, and social programs, appealing to the mutual interests of organizations and their publics (Brummett, 2000).

2.2 The History of Public Relations in Government Communication

Public relations in government communication shares similarities with general public relations theory, but it differs from many established definitions as it is descriptive rather than normative. It encompasses communication, action, relationships, and reputations. Although public relations strategies and tactics were initially established by political actors for political purposes, the majority of public relations theory and research has focused on corporate settings (Cutlip, 1995; Lamme & Russell, 2010). However, there is substantial evidence to support the idea that government public relations have existed since politics and society themselves (Martinelli, Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). Many contemporary political public relations strategies and tactics, such as relationship management, reputation management, rhetoric, and persuasion, have ancient roots in political public relations.

2.3. Practice of Public relation in Organizational Circumstances

The literature for this research is mostly concerned with how organizational circumstances affect the practice of public relations. The theory of systems (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p.72) asserts that open systems that permit mutual change between themselves and their environment are more likely to be effective and survive. This is where the most common use of this principle in public relations comes from. Practitioners of public relations act as boundary spanners in open system organizations, aiding the organization in the management of its connections with the many publics in the surrounding environment. On the other hand, organizational theory serves as a foundation for doing research on the influence that various organizational contexts have on the practice of public relations. Environmental analysis is vital because the actions of a company can only be understood in the context of the environment in which it operates (Derina R, 2005.408). Methodologies such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer, 1987), population ecology theory (Hannah & Freeman, 1984), and institutional theory (Selznick, 2011; Scott, 1987) are all helpful approaches to take when investigating the influence that organizational contexts have. Institutional theory, for instance, maintains that in situations dominated by social influences, such as Ethiopia, organizations would be rewarded for following to societal values,

conventions, standards, and beliefs if they were to do so in a manner that was seen acceptable by society.

Contingency theory argues that chaotic, rapidly changing, and unpredictable settings are the most crucial (Robbins, 1990, p. 8). There is a higher likelihood of political and legislative shifts in dynamic and unpredictable environments, which could prompt public relations professionals to look outside the company for answers, requiring them to actively interact with the external environment (Grunig, 2013, p.470). Organizational behavior is also significantly impacted by environmental uncertainty. Uncertain managers create structures that mirror the complexity they anticipate in the surrounding environment (Aldrich & Mindlin, 1978; Weick, 2012). This point of view might be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the function those public relations professionals play as boundary breakers during times of transformation. Expanded boundaries are a method that organizations utilize to mitigate the effects of uncertainty by amassing information that can be use in decision-making area. (Holtzhausen,D.R. 2005, p.409). There is consequentially a gap in the empirical data: none of these studies approached practitioners working in parties and government.

In addition, these fields are dominated by constant attempts to assess the positive or negative impact of communication experts in the political sphere. Consequently, the literature is divided between those fields that portray these practitioners as a threat to democracies – media and public relations– and those studies that regard these practitioners and their activities as beneficial for democratic debate (Hobbs, 2015): political marketing, political communication, and political public relations. Generally, scholars criticize spin doctors because they examine the relationship between politicians and news media from normative, liberal democratic ideals that argue for a free press serving as a watchdog of political powers (Raupp and Kocks, 2016). In that context, spin doctors are regarded as manipulative attempts from political parties to control free media. In contrast, the strategic perspective found in political studies understands the role of communication expertise in democracy as enhancing the relationship between parties and voters (Lees-Marshment, 2010) since communication strategies allow parties to better know their voters' needs and communicate their messages more efficiently, thus promoting democratic discourse.

2.4. Political System and Public Relations

A country's political system influences its social structure. There is little doubt that public relations practice thrives on public opinion, which would lead one to conclude that only pluralistic societies offer an environment that is conducive for practicing strategic public relations. Available evidence suggests that in societies whose political systems do not value public opinion, the nature of public relations is not sophisticated and tends to be one-way propagandistic in nature (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc. 2003).

However, democracy comes in many forms as is evident in the fact that almost each of the 192 current member states of the United Nations claims to be a democracy. These countries are able to make the claim because they have their own definitions of what democracy is or should be. As described in comprehensive reports such as the one from Freedom House Karatnycky, A. (2002) are indicative of the variability in the definition and practice of democracy around the world. Such descriptions are invariably helpful to international public relations scholars and professionals.

As noted in the introduction of the global public relations handbooks: theory, research, and practice edited by Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc (2003) since the beginning of the 1990s, the world has been evolving rather rapidly, with many countries undergoing political, economic, and societal changes. In particular, many former Soviet bloc countries have embarked on the road toward democratization and market reforms and now have economies in transition. These countries are currently in various stages of democratization and market reforms, offering varied opportunities and challenges to public relations professionals (ibid) for many of these countries the transition has neither been smooth nor consistent. Because the political environment determines the nature of public relations one can practice there, it is essential to conduct comparative research on the linkage between various political ideologies and public relations, a relationship that is yet to be empirically explored in most countries including countries in transition.

Typically, three types of political systems have been used in the past: Western industrialized democracies (the First World); Communist states (Second World); and the predominantly non-Western, developing countries (Third World). The collapse of the Soviet Union and its impact on the global power structure, among other things, makes this distinction moot. Furthermore, there are many newly industrializing countries that no longer fit the definition

of developing countries but are also not democratic in the Western sense and, therefore, cannot be categorized as belonging to the First World, according to the aforementioned definition (Wilson, 1995). Simon and Gartzke (1996) differentiated between political environments on a bipolar continuum ranging from democratic to authoritarian.

However, this categorization is too simplistic to provide details about the many nuances and the various political and economic challenges and experiences that many countries experience. The world has witnessed significant political changes in recent years. Thus, we should have a more accurate way to classify the political systems of nations. In fact, the 20th century has been a period of democratization of the world. According to the Freedom House, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was not a single country that could be labeled a democracy! Even countries such as the United States and Britain were not true democracies because they did not have universal suffrage at the beginning of the 20th century, Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc (2003).

One of the most comprehensive classifications of political systems, one that we prefer over the others, was proposed by the Freedom House in a project titled: "Democracy's Century: A Survey of Global Political Change in the 20th Century" (http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports/century.html#project). This project examined the political systems that governed the world in the 20th century at the beginning, middle, and turn of the century. In doing so, the study offered the following seven types of political systems: 1. Democracies wherein multiple parties and individuals compete in open elections to earn the right to rule for a predetermined period (unless there is a constitutionally mandated reason for earlier elections). In democracies, opposition parties have a fair chance of winning power or participate in power sharing as members of a coalition government. 2. Restricted democratic practices in which a single party controls key constituencies such as political institutions, the media, and the electoral process to maintain the status quo. Included in this list are countries that deny voting rights based on factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status. 3. Monarchies consisting of constitutional monarchies (a constitution specifies the powers of the monarch often devolving some power to elect and other bodies), traditional monarchies, and absolute monarchies (where the monarch rules as despot). 4. Authoritarian regimes that usually are one-party states or military dictatorships noted for significant human rights violations. 5. Totalitarian regimes wherein a single political party establishes total control over the society including intrusion into private life (e.g., Marxist–

Leninist and national socialist regimes). 6. Colonial and imperial dependencies, which are ruled by large imperial systems, mostly seen in the first half of the 20th century. 7. Protectorates that, of their own accord, request protection from a more powerful neighbor or are temporarily placed under protection by the international community, (ibid).

The global public relations handbooks: theory, research, and practice / edited by Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc. (2003) briefly stated that significance of these shifts to public relations lies in the fact that the Western definition of public relations assumes a democratic political structure in which competing groups seek legitimacy and power thorough public opinion and elections, which is not always the norm in many parts of the world. Particularly difficult to discern are emerging democracies where alternative views may be encouraged in theory but not in practice, resulting in various forms of covert and overt forms of self-, social, and government censorship.

The impact that each of these political systems has on public relations is yet to be explored by Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verˇciˇc 2003, affirm on their book that, democratization has spurred the growth of public relations in many regions of the world. Now is the time to analyze empirically how the other types of political systems affect public relations practices and the impact that public relations have in the process of democratization and in maintaining a particular political system.

The political climate of a country can significantly impacts the practice of public relations in government communication. In countries with a "loud public opinion" and freedom of public debate, public relations can exist and develop, as it requires certain conditions to prevent it from becoming sheer propaganda and advertisement (Sriramesh & Verˇciˇc, 2003). These conditions include freedom of speech, plurality of the media, free market, and free information flow (Sriramesh & Verˇciˇc, 2003). In addition, maintaining effective media relations requires that public relations professionals understand who controls the media organizations in a country and whether such control extends to editorial content (Grunig, Hunt, & Dozier, 1995).

However, the impact that public relations have in the process of democratization and in maintaining a particular political system has positive impact on the practice of public relations, Chen, 2003 states that “the adoption of public relations in the Chinese government has been a slow and evolving process, with a focus on relationship building and media

relations" (Chen, 2003). So that, it indicates that there need to be further assessment of the impact of political system in relation to relationship building and media relations.

In African governments in which one party or one leader determines public policy, there can be no true role for public relations as we define it. The party or leader may use communication techniques as a form of propaganda or manipulation to keep the people in line, but there would be no room for professional practitioners to practice on behalf of those who wanted to challenge or criticize the status quo or propose different ideas, policies, and procedures. Clearly, these communication practices would be labeled subversive, unlawful, and undemocratic. (Rensburg, 2023)

Ngirkudu, 2023 who studied the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in Sudan stated that, a more democratic environment is needed for the independence of public relations, with a focus on social advancement and harmony (Ngirkudu, 2023). When the study articulated his work affirmed that "This article indicates that the political change that has occurred in Sudan has a positive impact not only on the practice of public relations but will also affect the way in which public and private institutions are managed, especially if it is evaluated in a way that contributes to the development of laws and legislations that help building state institutions and contribute to creating a positive relationship between the citizen and public institutions. The article also stated that the intellectual and cultural changes that accompanied the political change have a positive effect on the practice of public relations, so it is necessary for public relations departments in public and private institutions to consider the cultural diversity that characterizes Sudan, through understanding those cultures, which helps create consensus and ensure public interest" (p. 92).

However, the study was gap to fully address how political change specifically influenced the way public relations practice, besides this, even though cultural and intellectual changes need a specific assessment the study articulate their effects accompanied with political change. Therefore, the researcher believes that it's need to further empirical investigation of influence for each variable, such as, cultural, economic and political change that had on the practice of public relations. Similarly, related literature in South Africa conforms that, public relations become more strategic during times of change, with a greater emphasis on important political constituencies and cross-cultural communication (Holtzhausen, 2005).

2.5. The Role of Public Relations in Government Communication within Democracy

Public relation has been lauded by advocates and advanced as an essential feature of a healthy democracy and part of a free marketplace for the exchange of ideas. Such views recur across a spectrum of public relations theory, from the Grunigian paradigm of ethical public relations illustrated through two-way symmetry in public communication (Grunig and Hunt 1984), to a collaborative symmetrical relationship where 'communicators keep their eye on a broad professional perspective of balancing private and public interests' (Grunig 2000: 34).

Despite differing views both supportive and critical on its credibility, many scholars agree that government communication can be viewed as a socially-responsible practice. Of course, it is important to examine how a particular government views certain political variables, such as the roles of civil servants or democracy (if any). Doing so will give hints to how a country's government views public relations. Gelders & Ihlen (2010), for example argues that government communication is supposed to promote cultural values citing as an example that when a country hosts the Olympics or other high-profile event for the world to see.

Serving different interests by helping them articulate their views and be seen and heard in the political debate, public relations play a crucial role for democracy. As informing citizens are the cornerstones of a democracy, and keeping stakeholders and publics informed has been a cornerstone of public relations for half a century as Kent, Harrison, & Taylor (2006) noted. Government communication can therefore make people feel as part of a democratic process, giving anyone a genuine voice, so that it increases genuine participation. Public relations professionals should therefore push for more inclusiveness, more transparency, more stakeholder input, more public input, more lectures, and more physical and virtual spaces where people can come and talk about ideas and issues.

In the early 80s scholars began to maintain that the growth of government and the media have come to a point which would change the nature of the political process. As (Orren, 1986) pointed out, the public relations taking over some of the vital functions of political parties and moving into the center of the political system adapts the practices of politics and government and serves as links between the government and citizens.

In a public that is heavily influenced by media of all different types, government communication works to identify, revise and clarify governmental arguments in the face of media scrutiny (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010, p. 61; Signitzer & Wamser, 2005, p. 457). In general, since government communication uses many of the same tactics as journalism (time-sensitive written pieces, broadcast media and a digital presence, and others), government communication is effective at spurring public debate on stories written by journalists.

2.6. The Media and Practice of Public Relation

One cannot overstate the critical relationship between the mass media and public relations. There is near unanimity among authors of public relations literature that the media and public relations have a symbiotic, sometimes contentious, relationship. Most public relations practitioners would agree that media relation accounts for a significant portion of their public relations efforts because they wish to use the media for publicity purposes. However, public relations professionals also serve the media by providing them with information subsidies. Wilcox and Nolte (1997) observed that despite the continued tension between public relations professionals and journalists, the symbiosis in the relationship requires that they maintain "a solid working relationship based on mutual respect for each other's work" (p. 285). Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2000) stated that for public relations professionals, "good working relationships with media personnel are always important for smooth functioning ..." (p. 395). In their book, On Deadline, Howard and Mathews (2000) stressed the need to practice strategic media relations as part of an overall program of public relations and proposed several aspects of effective media relations, such as the characteristics of a good spokesperson. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) reiterated that public relations practitioners will find media relations to be an "economical, effective method of communicating with large and widely dispersed publics" (p. 304).

Hiebert (2005) argues that due to economic and political pressures the mass media can no longer be relied upon to fulfill this role, he suggests „the only possible solution is PR, not in terms of spin or propaganda but in terms of developing real public relationships in the public sphere" (p. 3). Fairbanks et al (2007) make the point that all organizations, including governments, must be proactive in reaching out to their publics: „In addition to the open sharing of information, transparency requires organizations to understand and be responsive to the publics they serve" (p. 26).

However, some have warned of the dangers of fake government „dialogic" relationships, engaged in merely in order to legitimize the discourse which it wishes to promote. Motion (2005) argues „Participative public relations, in which stakeholders are discursively engaged with pre-determined solutions and conflict suppressed or ignored, May, in fact, simply be a means of masking power relations rather than genuine engagement" (p. 511). Such will strategies ultimately encourage cynicism and distrust of government and disillusionment with democratic institutions. PR practitioners working for government may struggle with conflicts of interest. They will obviously have the interests of their organization and perhaps their immediate political boss as a key influence on their conduct but, like the elected politicians they serve, they ultimately have a duty to put the public interest first. Government policy and legislation impacts on citizens, organizations and institutions throughout society making influencing policy and legislation which benefits one's „interest" highly desirable and this is the primary task of public affairs.

The political landscape in many democratic societies is changing with mainstream political parties declining in membership numbers while the appetite for joining pressure groups, single interest and voluntary groups is one the rise. Perhaps this reflects a decline more generally in traditional societal institutions or maybe a more consumerist approach to politics (Grant, 2000).

2.6.1. Mass media and the images of nations

Central to the assertions of the aforementioned public relations scholars is their recognition of the power of mass media to influence public opinion and shape public discourse. Mass media have a powerful influence on organizational activities in general and public relations in particular. Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) recognized the potency of mass media by linking media coverage with the international images of nations. The authors studied the television coverage of the opening ceremony of the Seoul Olympics by the British Broadcasting Corporation, the United States' National Broadcasting Corporation, and Australia's TEN networks and concluded that a large majority of developing countries received no mention at all during these telecasts, whereas a few developed countries received very positive and extended coverage. The authors concluded that the media do play a powerful role in influencing how individual countries are perceived globally.

Typically, developing nations are stereotyped positively by most media, whereas developing countries are generally negatively portrayed. The findings by Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) are of particular relevance to international public relations practitioners who are often called on by developing countries to change the way they are perceived by the public of developed nations. Kunczik (1993), who discusses at length the use of the media by nations for public relations studied the news and advertisements of developing countries in German media and remarked: "since most people's scope of experience is naturally very limited, and their knowledge of complex social processes in other countries comes mainly from the mass media, there is always the danger that, due to the process of news selection, there are differences between 'real reality' and 'media reality'" (p. 1). Kunczik concluded that many developing countries often view fighting negative media stereotyping as a losing battle, one that they often choose not to wage primarily due to a lack of resources. But other developing nations recognize the need to be heard in the developed world as part of their public diplomacy because they desperately need foreign aid from developed countries and loans from world bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, which requires support from key developed countries such as the United States. Because of the powerful effects that the media have in shaping public opinion nationally and internationally, public relations professionals have given primacy to media relations.

To conduct effective media relations, international public relations practitioners need to understand the nature of media environment in a particular country. Only then can they develop strategies for conducting effective media relations suitable to that environment. Currently, the only source for understanding different global media environments is the body of literature in the field of mass communication that describes normative theories of global media systems first proposed by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) and subsequently revised and enhanced by several authors (e.g., Altschull, 1984; Hachten, 1981; L. J. Martin & Choudhary, 1983; Merrill & Lowenstein, 1971). The media systems concept is outdated because of significant world changes, especially in the 1990s. For example, the fall of the Soviet bloc obviates the Soviet media theory, and the fall of Communism in all but a few isolated countries make the Communist media theory of limited use. Therefore, there is a need to re-conceptualize the media environment around the world. Sriramesh (1999) proposed a framework of three factors (media control, media outreach, and media access) that should help public relations professionals design media relations strategies that are appropriate to different media environments. Adhering to this framework may make it easier

for international public relations professionals to maintain effective channels of communication between their client organizations and relevant media around the world. (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verˇciˇc, 2003)

2.6.2. Media control

Maintaining effective media relations requires that public relations professionals understand who controls the media organizations in a country and whether such control extends to editorial content. In his introduction to the 1999 World Press Survey conducted by Freedom House, Sussman (1999) stated that "Not until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 did those areas of the world under Communist domination begin to experience some freedom of the news media" (p. 1). The author also reported that in many regions of the world press freedom was weakened by inexperienced journalists and partisan control of the media. In Freedom House's 2002 survey, there was clear evidence that press freedom was an outcome of more pluralistic regimes. Around the world, media ownership is limited to a few principal sources depending on the nature of political system and level of economic development of the country. Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and Dejan Verˇciˇc states in the global public relations handbooks: theory, research, and practice edited in 2023, that in developed democracies, it is the capitalistic entrepreneur who invests in the media, sustaining media operations principally through sale of advertisements and relying, to a relatively smaller extent, on revenue from subscriptions. There is minimal direct or indirect fiduciary relationship between the government and media organizations in capitalistic systems. On the contrary, in developing countries, one can often discern media ownership in the hands of political interests as well as the elites of the society. Maintaining the status quo is often paramount for these media Moghuls as an incentive to influence media content. In many developing countries, even though the media may be overtly owned by private interests, they are strictly monitored and controlled through overt and covert means by political or government forces. Sussman (1999) reported that the Freedom House survey had found that "the muzzling of journalists was increasingly accomplished by more subtle, legalistic methods than through violence or outright repression" (p. 1). Government advertisements are a principal method for political rulers to maintain control over media content. Because advertising income forms the bulk of revenue (and, therefore, the basic means of survival) for a large section of private media in many developing countries, this subtle method of control is often very effective. Controlling the supply of the means of production such as newsprint (often imported by the

government and sold to media organizations at subsidized costs) is another effective way for governments to maintain their control over privately owned mass media. It is also not uncommon for political rulers of developing nations to own their own media outlets (usually print media) and use them for controlling public opinion with the sole purpose of maintaining the status quo. Editorial freedom is directly proportional to the level of economic development of a country. It is the lack of resources and infrastructure that have limited editorial freedom in developing nations. In their study of the relationship between press freedom and social development in 134 nations, Weaver, Buddenbaum, and Fair (1985) concluded that "the stronger the media are economically, the less likely the government is to control these media" (p. 113).

2.6.3 Media management

McNair (2003) notes that in the context of political communication „media management comprises activities designed to maintain a positive-media relationship, acknowledging the needs which each has of the other, while exploiting the institutional characteristics of both sets of actors for maximum advantage" (p. 136). However, at the same time the relationship between politicians and the media can obviously involve a struggle between two different sets of interests and agendas. Moloney (2006) offers two conceptualizations of the government-media relationship one in market terms as an „exchange relationship" and the other in military terms as a „contest relationship". He notes: The exchange relationship characterizes government and media as traders; the contest relationship as opponents. The exchange relationship implies two equally satisfied parties while the contest one implies winners and losers. The role of the media as watchdogs is consistent with the contest model. Public relations people invariably favor the exchange relationship but are prepared and skilled for the contest one (Moloney, 2006, p. 126). From the perspective of the contest model the journalist attempts to seek out and present the „facts" while the politician will want to ensure that a news story reflects the „message" that they wish to convey. There is nothing particularly new in the attempt by the political elites to try and control media representations, as is revealed in various accounts of the development and growth of political PR from the early years of the 20th century onwards (Pearson, 1992; McNair, 2003; L"Etang, 1998b, 2004). This expansion of PR activity has unsurprisingly been accompanied by an increasing reliance upon media management strategies. Some commentators (Fairclough, 2000; McNair, 2003; Franklin, 2004,) have pointed to the increasing use of the „sound bite"

and the „pseudo-event“ (Boorstein, 1962), of „image management“ and „spin“, as key strategies used by politicians to control media representations of them and their policies.

2.6.4 Sound bites and pseudo-events

As the use of spin and information management by government has increased, the impact upon journalism has been perceptible. Cockerell et al. (1984) note that, in regard to the political process in the UK, „Very few journalists have had the incentive to dig deeper, to mine the bedrock of power rather than merely scour its topsoil“ (p. 11). It is the broadcast journalists“ „job“ to pick out the key details or important points of any political event or speech. If that task is made easier, if the speech contains memorable phrases (soundbites) which summaries the main points, then there is a good chance that these portions of the speech will be selected and broadcast on the few minutes allotted to „story“ on the broadcast news bulletins. Tony Blair“s phrase „tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime“ from a speech made when he was Shadow Home Secretary has entered the national consciousness. It is indeed a memorable phrase, but it is important to remember that being „tough“ and talking about being „tough“ was a carefully constructed aspect of the Blair style. Fairclough (2000) argues that „Blair“s “toughness” has been self-consciously built into his communicative style as a matter of policy and strategy“ (p. 8). Occasionally, Blair let the façade of the soundbite communication culture slip, when after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland he famously uttered, „A Day like today is not a day for soundbites, really. But I feel the hand of history upon our shoulders“ (BBC 2007). The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, elected in May 2010, has paid similar attention to the soundbite: David Cameron and his Ministers have constantly repeated that with respect of the financial crises and public spending cuts, „we are all in this together“. In its first year in office, Ministers in the Coalition have often repeated the mantra that they are „fixing the financial mess that Labor left us“.

2.6.5 Spin and image management

Defining political spin is very difficult, and some commentators note that there is a danger that the term is now used to describe so many activities that it is in danger of becoming meaningless. Andrews (2006) points to the fact that today practically all of a government’s promotional activities seem to be referred to as „spin“. Gaber (2000a) argues that „As long as politicians have been politicking, spinners have been spinning“ (p. 61). However, there

are some definitions that we can forward that make sense of a phenomenon that is ancient, and yet in its current form, quite recent. Street (2001) locates spin within media relations and states that it involves „getting the right image, making the right connections, and ensuring that both appear on the next day's front page" (p. 1). McNair (2004) argues that spin is a „convenient and media 7 friendly shorthand for a particular kind of political public relations, with the negative connotation of spinning a yarn" (p. 328). Spin is probably best understood as a process that became intensified, and better funded and resourced under Bill Clinton"s New Democrats and Tony Blair"s New Labour in the 1990s. As we have suggested above, spin became more professionalized, and increasingly carried out by professional and dedicated information and communication managers under New Labour. Describing the role of spin in the New Labour project, Ludlam and Smith (2001) argue that it can be understood as a „new strategic thinking - against which all programmatic or organizational initiatives were judged - and this dominated the struggle for electability" (p. 24). Gaber (2000b) argues that in trying to understand spin, we can break down it down into two categories: the „above the line" and the „below the line" tactics that a spin doctor may employ. The „above the line" category includes those activities that would be considered routine, and that „would have caused an "old fashioned" press officer no great difficulty" (Gaber 2000b, p. 508). These activities may be carried out by civil servants working in communication, without breaking any regulations or straying into the „politicization" of the civil service. They relate to the everyday business of government communication, and as such are often banal, receiving little coverage in the press. These activities might include releasing press releases, holding press conferences, and using Ministerial speeches and answers to Parliamentary questions in the House of Commons to communicate information. Gaber (2000b) also identifies „Reacting to government/party announcements…publicizes speeches, interviews and articles…reacting to interviews or speeches…reacting to breaking news events" (p. 509) as activities that can all be grouped into this category. The „Below the line" category includes those activities employed by spin doctors that are not conventional, and at times, ethically questionable. Gaber (2000b) identifies that these activities are „usually covert and as much about strategy and tactics as about the imparting of information" (p. 508). „Below the line" activities include „Staying on message (ensuring a consistent line is taken) …setting and driving the news agenda (ensuring that government receives coverage on its terms) …kite flying (testing out reaction to a policy before a formal announcement) " and „fire breaking" (2000b, p. 510-512). In the case of „fire breaking", this involves distracting journalists from

a particular story, by planting another of greater significance. Gaber (2000a) notes that an example of this happened in 1997, when the „News of the World revealed the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, was engaged in an extra-marital affair“ (p. 65). Promptly, the New Labour spin machine constructed a smoke screen, by releasing two stories, relating to MI6 investigation of Chris Patten, and the possible reprieve of the Royal Yacht Britannia, that was due for scrapping at the time. All these tactics represent real events that 8 occurred during New Labour‟s time in office: the next section addresses one case study regarding how New Labour communicated on the subject of welfare reform.

2.6.6 Impact of new media

Due to the media's significance, it has become imperative for public relations to leverage new media as a means to reach both internal and external audiences of an institution. Public relations utilize various electronic platforms, such as blogs, forums, electronic magazines, news sites, email, and social networking sites, to disseminate information to the public under normal circumstances and during times of crisis. The Public Relations Department aims to influence the target audience through its presence on these platforms. (Saeed & Alzitawi, 2023)

The use of new media within institutions offers numerous advantages. Over the past few years, new media has emerged as a viable option due to its speed and ability to reach large audiences. Additionally, new media allows for interactive two-way communication or monolithic communication, depending on the desired purpose. It provides flexibility in terms of time commitments for both the audience and institutions. New media also enables participation and widespread dissemination, allowing news to be shared across multiple platforms and locations. Communication can occur horizontally between equal parties or vertically between the center and the periphery, reducing the role of traditional media as intermediaries between citizens and institution management. Moreover, it reduces the costs associated with sending and receiving information compared to traditional methods. (Saeed & Alzitawi, 2023) New media offers instant communication and rapid exchange of information and opinions, while also minimizing physical and social barriers that impede communication in traditional media (Al-Saeed, 2022).

Selin (2017) identified suitable communication methods for new media, including submitting proposals and guidance through new media channels, issuing regular publications

regarding the crisis and its resolution via social media platforms, building trustworthy communication relationships with the institution's audience, publishing advertisements and messages about the institution's capabilities on new platforms, and constructing an electronic public space to enhance the institution's reputation.

The new media plays a vital role in enhancing public relations, particularly in government institutions, as observed through the attitudes and continuous efforts of public relations professionals to find the most effective ways and methods to serve customers and the public (Alsharif et al., 2023).

The Internet has revolutionized the field of public relations, altered not only communication methods but also expanded the scope of public relations as a whole. The Internet can adapt to various fields, including journalism, advertising, marketing, and public relations, wherein public relations play a persuasive role rather than adhering to the objective rules of journalism. Public relations content is freely provided to the media and the public, who receive and interact with the message based on their information and previous experiences. Digital media offers a wide range of communication opportunities, allowing public relations officers to engage with their audience without the need for special arrangements like press conferences. The Internet empowers public relations officers with numerous services that, when utilized effectively, enable the implementation of comprehensive public relations programs and ensure their success. The continuous and remarkable development of these media and the public's interaction with them make them highly influential tools for delivering messages compared to other means. Moreover, these services provide vast research opportunities through search indicators. (Saeed & Alzitawi, 2023)

2.7 The Public Sphere Ideal and Public Affairs

Dahlgren (2001) notes that in its original formulation, the public sphere as described by Habermas consists of the institutional space where political will formation takes place, via the unfettered flow of relevant information and ideas‟ (p. 33). In Habermas‟ analysis the public sphere emerged within the bourgeois classes of late eighteenth century Western Europe, and was aided by the development of mass literacy. The Enlightenment ideals of rational thinking, argument and discussion were, albeit imperfectly, manifested in the clubs, coffee houses, newspapers and pamphlet writing which characterized this era. In his historical analysis Habermas traced the decay of the public sphere as the nineteenth century

developed, with the logic of the marketplace coming to dominate the media, resulting in an increasing trivialization of political debate. Habermas calls this process the „re-feudalization" of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). Whether or not we have anything today which could qualify as a functioning public sphere has been widely debated (Dahlgren, 2001; Sparks, 2001) but many commentators would argue that at the very least the concept retains a usefulness as a normative vision. Bennett and Entman (2001) suggest that in the ideal public sphere „all citizens have equal access to communication that is both independent of government constraint, and through its deliberative, consensus building capacity, constrains the agendas and decisions of government in turn" (p. 2). They note that of course this ideal has never been achieved, and probably never will. Nevertheless, the concept „serves theorists well as an ideal type – that is, as a construct against which different real-world approximations can be evaluated" (Bennett and Entman, 2001, p. 3). In respect to the political public sphere Richards (2004) notes that in Habermas" formulation „the public in the liberal democracies should be a participatory public, the collective of citizens engaged, ideally, in informed and rational discussion, and in dialogue with their leaders" (p. 173)

2.7.1. Public affairs

Harris and Moss (2001) have noted that „the term "public affairs" remains one that is surrounded by ambiguity and misunderstanding" (p. 110). Arguably this is much more of an issue in the UK than it is, for example, in the US and this is primarily to do with how public relations and public affairs are conceived of in the two national contexts. The two activities clearly overlap in several key ways although the nature of their relationship tends to be viewed somewhat differently in US literature compared to UK perspectives. A typical US public relations textbook describes public affairs as merely one aspect of public relations work: „PR counseling firms use the public affairs label for their lobbying and governmental relations services designed to help clients understand and address regulatory and legislative processes (Broom, 2009, p. 35).

McGrath (2005) argues that it is this conception of public affairs, as a public relations strategic specialism, that is articulated by the majority of practitioners in the US. In the UK however the relationship between public affairs and public relations is viewed rather differently, in fact commentators from the UK frequently resist or downplay the idea that there is any necessary connection at all between the two activities. Moloney notes; Many professional lobbyists reject their inclusion in PR, joining the flight from it as a work title

and preferring euphemisms such as government relations, political communications and public affairs specialists. For these separatists, PR is public campaigning via the media, as opposed to private and confidential approaches to persuade powerful persons face to face. (2000, p. 113) While some may see merit in articulating a conceptual difference between the two activities, public affairs whether in the UK, the US, or elsewhere, almost always involves much more than just face-to-face "insider" dealings with those who hold power in public policy arenas.

Arguably a considerable amount of public affairs activity is indistinguishable from public relations activity and indeed one of the arguments of this chapter is that shared conceptual understandings and theoretical explanations of both public affairs and public relations can enrich our understanding and analysis of practitioner work.

McGrath (2005) offers a succinct and useful discussion of definitional issues and points out that in many accounts, particularly those written by practitioners, which attempt to define the activity lack clarity at best and, at worst, are rather confusing and contradictory. McGrath cites Milbrath"s, straightforward and still relevant, 50-year-old definition to describe the essential features of lobbying. Milbrath notes „lobbying is the stimulation and transmission of a communication, by someone other than a citizen acting on his own behalf, directed to a governmental decision-maker with the hope of influencing his decision" (Milbrath, 1963, p. 8).

Clearly as is evident from Milbrath"s description defining lobbying is a simpler task than defining public affairs. Lobbying, almost irrespective of where it is practiced, is essentially an advocacy activity directed at government/legislators and carried out by actors within or on behalf of a group or organization. However public affairs should not be narrowly conceived and limited to advocacy efforts to influence government policy through direct contact with political actors by organizational members or representatives. Harris and Moss (2001) point out: Those adopting a broader perspective see public affairs as managing a broader range of relationships with organizational stakeholders, particularly those which may have public policy implications, in which they may employ a range of marketing communications and public relations tools (p. 110).

It is this broader definition that we adopt because public affairs work almost always involves monitoring and intelligence gathering in the public policy sphere and engagement with the

wider public sphere through media relations activities. It may also involve building relationships and coordinating activities with other actors engaged in pursuing the same interest or promoting the same cause. Depending on the organization it may also involve coordinating grassroots activities by members of one's own group and those sympathetic to its agenda.

2.7.1.1. Pressure groups and interest groups

Who engages in public affairs and lobbying activity? Essentially it is those actors who have an interest in the development of public policy but are not directly engaged in legislating or governing. These actors tend to be described as „interest groups" in the much of the US literature and „pressure groups" in the literature on the UK/EU context. If we examine typical definitions of what constitutes a pressure group it is clear that the „pressure" that groups exert is in respect to attempts to influence political agendas and more specifically the development and implementation of public policy and legislation. Grant (2000) writing on the UK/EU context states that; „A pressure group is an organization which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy, public policy representing a set of authoritative decisions taken by the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary, and by local government and the European Union" (p. 14). Coxall (2001) in his analysis of pressure group politics makes an important distinction between a „cause" group which „is formed to promote a particular cause based on a set of shared attitudes, values or beliefs: examples are Greenpeace, the Child Poverty Action Group and Amnesty International" and a „sectional" group which „represents the self-interest of a particular economic or social group in society: examples are the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the British Medical Association (BMA)" (Coxall, 2001, p. 5). Thomas (2004) in the key US work in the area echoes closely the above definition of a pressure group, when he notes that the interest group is „an association of individuals or organizations or a public or private institution that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favor" (p. 4).

2.7.1.2. Activism

Activist groups are special interest groups that arise around an organization in order to establish some type of change around their particular issue of concern. Activist groups normally arise from a "grassroots movement," meaning that it comes from everyday citizens,

rather than those who work in government. That fact makes it slightly different from an NGO and oftentimes activist groups are less official in the formal structure of their organization and its nonprofit status, compared to nonprofits or NGOs. Activist groups can be small and informal (Andy Schmitz, 2012).

Activist groups can differ in their purposes and reasons for existing, and in the amount of action-taking behavior that they undertake. Activist groups exert power on organizations in many forms of pressure, such as appearances at "town hall" type meetings, rallies and demonstrations, boycotts, anti–web sites, e-mail campaigns, letter-writing campaigns, phone calls to legislators, lobbying, and events designed specifically to garner media attention. Activist groups are usually filled with young, educated, and motivated ideologues with a strong devotion to acting on behalf of their cause. These groups are normally quite effective in their efforts to have organizations integrate their values into organizational policy (Andy Schmitz, 2012).

Activism provides public relations professional's challenges and opportunities. These days, it is not uncommon to find public relations professionals representing both sides of an activist movement. (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verˇciˇc,2003) The public relations body of knowledge has not paid much attention to the relationship between activism and public relations. Young as it is, the body of knowledge of international public relations has yet to study the linkage between activism and public relations. L. A. Grunig (1992) stated that activist groups are motivated to "improve the functioning of the organization from outside (p. 504)." Organizations have continued to face increasing pressure from activists' groups who often take various names such as pressure groups, special interest groups, or social movements. Whereas activists believe that they force organizations (especially corporations) to be socially responsible by challenging them, organizations seek to gain autonomy from such challenges that usually drain resources from a corporation's bottom line. Mintzberg (1983) contended that almost every type of organization faces pressures from activist groups at one time or the other. In addition to activism against corporations, one encounters activism in other forms. Social movements have won nations freedom from colonial rule, much of which happened after World War II principally in Africa and Asia.

Theocratic activism has also influenced the political and social structures of many nations and continues to be a potent factor today in many regions of the world. (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc,2003) Therefore, it is critical for us to assess the nature of activism

prevalent in a society and determine how it influences the public relations activities of that country. The international public relations professional cannot ignore activism on a global level.

2.8. Ethical Considerations and Public Relations Practice

An immanent feature of current public relations involves therefore a constant evolution of methods and means of communication, and thus permanent development. After the four well known stages of PR development outlined by J. Grunig and T. Hunt (1984) we already face another one (Dozier, Grunig, Grunig, 1995), referred to as “excellent PR” or “win-win” (carrying out dialogue to create partnership communication leading to innovative solutions both in the public, as well as in the business sphere) and surely this is not the last stage of PR development.

The specialist is expected not only to conduct dialogue but also to have practical knowledge about ways and tools that make it effective. Continuous development of those tools, deeper knowledge about human behavior, as well as technological advances in the area of communication means results in the fact that public relations business becomes richer and covers a broader scope of communications. Evolutionary democratization of communication has an impact on the development of public relations techniques and tools, while rising social requirements impose better professional public relations standards and more focus on the presented values and ethics (Grunig, Hunt, & Dozier, 1995). Further perfection of communication principles seems to head towards reinforcing ethical values in this partnership communication. PR is an element of democracy it cannot exist in monoculture and dictatorship. There are no possibilities of development in the climate of mafia-like intimidation, corruption, when access to information is limited perspectives of regarding or assessing concrete institutions (businesses), people, groups or parties are deformed. Without PR understood in this way public communication will have no sufficient tools of critical thinking and assessment which we expect of all mass media (Jerzy Oledzki,2012).

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in government communication and public relations practice. The foundation of ethical functioning in public relations involves respect for others. The principle of social responsibility is one of the rules reflecting the ethos of the public relations profession and has a significant impact on the effectiveness of public relations activities. The evolving ethical landscape in government communication raises challenges

and ethical dilemmas for public relations practitioners, emphasizing the need for ethical conduct in public relations practice (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc ,2003).

2.9. Contemporary Theories/Approaches

2.9.1. Emerging theories of information technology

Public relations literature related to information technology is growing at a fantastic rate and rapidly moving in several directions. These works are largely outside the purview of this study, however, because most of it is noticeably a theoretic and has not focused on testing theories or contributing to theory building. There are exceptions, such as Vorvoreaunu (2008), who developed and tested a conceptual framework on the experience of visiting public relations (or other) websites based on user experience, organization-public relationship building and maintenance, as well as message-centered approaches. Other scholars, such as Phillips (2009), have sought to apply existing public relations models and theories to practices involving social media. For some scholars and practitioners, new technologies are a blessing in that they make it increasingly possible to develop direct relationships with more people and at a faster speed than in the past (Botan, forthcoming). Others see technology as a mixed blessing for public relations in part because of increased stakeholder expectations of the organization's ability to communicate openly and deliver goods and services (Kazoleas & Teigen 2006).

A) Message/Channel-Centered theories

While there is some overlap with practitioner-centered theories, particularly the journalist in residence model, message-centered theories shift the focus towards the construction of public relations messages and the channels used to disseminate them. A non-exhaustive list of such theories includes press agentry and media relations, framing, agenda setting, rhetoric, and persuasion (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verˇciˇc,2003).

B) Press agentry and media relations

Both press agentry and media relations are center around the development of messages that garner coverage in the mass media. However, the similarities end there. Press agentry places emphasis on crafting messages solely for the purpose of gaining media coverage and has been recognized as a theory since at least 1984 when Grunig and Hunt included it in their discussion on the evolution of public relations theory. Press agents are often seen as

practitioners who prioritize promoting their client's name recognition without regard for truthfulness, which intersects with the hired gun lay theory. While this model played a significant role in the careers of early practitioners like Ivy Lee, it has evolved into the specialized fields of media relations and publicists. Although the term "publicist" has predominantly been associated with the entertainment industry, it carries a dubious history and is closely linked to press agentry by many. On the other hand, media or press relations experts focus on cultivating ongoing relationships with the media and are committed to truthfulness. According to Zoch and Molleda (2006: 279), media relations involve "the vision of the practitioner as the mouthpiece who tells the organization's good news-only story." The field of public relations has expanded beyond the notion of solely handling such one-way positive messages, as it once did, but media relations remain a critical aspect of the practice and an integral part of being a practitioner.

C) Framing

The concept of framing can be traced back to the writings of sociologists Erving Gofman (1974) and anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1955) and has been extensively explored in various academic disciplines. Entman's (1993) widely cited definition explains that frames serve to highlight specific aspects of the described reality, thereby diverting attention away from other aspects. Zoch and Molleda (2006: 283) make use of the metaphor of a window frame, stating that the message framer has the ability to emphasize certain elements in the message, just as a carpenter emphasizes the view through a window by strategically placing the frame. Public relations practitioners have the capability to influence how the media frames a story by selectively emphasizing or withholding information regarding a subject or issue from those covering the story. To achieve this objective, practitioners engaged in media relations need to thoroughly construct and process information about their organization before sharing it with the media (Zoch & Molleda 2006). Additionally, media relations practitioners create prepackaged information, known as information subsidies, to promote their organizations' perspectives on issues and to spotlight significant aspects within those issues for both internal and external audiences.

D) Agenda setting

A concept closely related to framing, is discussed by Botan (forthcoming). This theory, associated with Maxwell McCombs and his colleagues (cf. McCombs & Shaw 1972), asserts

that the media's coverage of issues shapes the public agenda. In other words, the matters that receive considerable media attention are considered important and consequently influence what the public thinks about. It is notable to observe that agenda setting does not determine what individuals should perceive about a matter, but rather what they will perceive about. From a public relations standpoint, agenda setting focuses on how professional communicators, particularly those in public relations and journalism, influence the public agenda (e.g., Bentele & Nothhat 2008). Taken to its logical conclusion, agenda setting implies that it is possible to sway what issues the public thinks about by exerting power over what receives media coverage. Scholars have identified agenda building as a series of interconnected processes or stages (Zoch & Molleda 2006). For example, Johnson et al. (1996) propose that the collective and reciprocal nature of the agenda-building process suggests that the press, the public and public officials mutually influence and are influenced by one another. Zoch and Molleda conclude that framing serves as a tool for practitioners to actively participate in the process of media agenda building.

E) Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the oldest body of scholarship used in public relations. The global public relations handbooks: theory, research, and practice, Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Dejan Verˇciˇc. (2003) explore that dating back to classical Greece and it great thinkers, like Aristotle, the rhetorical tradition is about 2 400 years old and embraces the symbol-using (i. e., language) capacity of humans as well as the special human ability to use such symbols persuasively to organize, cooperate, plan and bind knowledge over time through writing. Rhetoric can be used to advance the cause of reasoned and free decision-making but as able opponents such as Socrates said, rhetoric can also be used to promote baser instincts and, thus, possibly spoil its constructive potential. For example, one of the things the study of rhetoric has traditionally included is how to speak effectively in public. Yet many famous speeches have had as their purpose the constraint of choices and rationality through appeals to emotion and not the expansion of perceived options or the use of rationality. Rhetorical studies are often limited by a focus on the message and its effectiveness measured only in terms of serving the corporation’s interests. Rhetorical studies typically lack the voice of the other party in the public debate. For example, individuals with different interpretations of corporate message or different perspectives on ethical values and what is socially responsible are often excluded from a rhetorical analysis. Nevertheless, as the art of finding all the available means

of persuasion in a situation, rhetoric has been practiced by public relations practitioners as long as there have been such practitioners, even though most of them have not realized that they have been practicing as rhetoricians. His fact that the vast majority of these practitioners have not been formally trained in rhetoric and its 2 400-year ethical tradition may explain some of the more egregious practices in public relations history.

F) Persuasion

As we noted just above, classical rhetoric has usually been defined as the art of finding all the available means of persuasion in a situation. The body of public relations theory that seeks to find available means of persuasion without using a rhetorical framework is persuasion theory. Public relation shares an interest in persuasion theory with the rest of communication, social psychology, marketing, political science and host of other fields. Persuasive communication in » an attempt to shape, change and/or reinforce perception, affect (feelings), cognition (thinking), and/or behavior, plays a pivotal role in many public relations activities… « (Pfau & Wan 2006: 102). Unlike rhetoric, persuasion is distinctly rooted in social psychology and communication. Pfau and Wan (2006) propose that application of persuasion theories such as involvement and information processing inform public relations theory. One example is inoculation theory, which was first popularized by William McGuire (1964) as a means of building resistance to persuasion. In the public relations context, the inoculation practitioner communicates with publics before they hear some other persuasive message in order to inoculate them against the impact of the coming message (Pfau & Wan 2006). In supportive inoculation a public that already agrees with the organization is given additional arguments supporting that position. In reputational inoculation publics first hear counter-arguments from the other side then hear refutation of those arguments. The role of persuasion has sparked controversy in public relations over whether the field should operate from a persuasive, one-way asymmetrical model or a non-persuasive two-way symmetrical model. For example, Grunig and Grunig (1992) argue that their symmetrical model of communication is inherently superior because it is not manipulative. For these authors, the principal objective of public relations is understanding not persuasion. Pfau and Wan (2006) countered that regardless of which model a practitioner likes, persuasion is intrinsic to public relations activities aimed at external publics. It plays an implicit role in core functions of public relations, such as community relations, media relations, and crisis communication. Persuasion is explicit in such endeavors as fundraising,

lobbying, and commercial and social marketing (Pfau & Wan 2006) as well as social movements, religious public relations, and political campaigning.

2.10. Theoretical Framework

2.10.1. Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory, advanced by James E. Grunig and other scholars, extends the symmetrical model of public relations by emphasizing that effective public relations contribute to organizational success through the cultivation of quality, long-term relationships with strategic publics.

This theory suggests that organizations must be willing to adapt their behaviors and include public relations managers in decision-making processes. As a normative theory, it provides guidance on best practices for public relations professionals and explores the connection between specific practices and successful outcomes. According to Botan and Trowbridge (2015), this approach is functional and transitional, balancing the focus between organizational and public interests.

Grunig's work underscores the value of public relations in promoting organizational and societal effectiveness by highlighting the importance of social responsibility in managerial decisions and fostering quality stakeholder relationships. The theory posits that organizations must address the concerns and goals of their stakeholders to avoid resistance and additional costs. Effective organizations identify and communicate with affected publics to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships.

To behave in socially acceptable ways, organizations must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them. Then, organizations must communicate symmetrically with publics (taking the interests of both the organization and publics into account) to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with them (Grunig, 2006; Toth, 2007).

2.10.2. Generic Principles of Excellence

Grunig's Excellence Study identified key variables that contribute to organizational effectiveness, distilled into ten generic principles that apply across various contexts, including different cultures, organizational sizes, and industries. The Excellence Study team,

which was headed by Dr. Grunig, identified 10 generic principles of excellent PR (Vercic and Grunig, 1996), These principles include:

1. Involvement of PR in strategic management.

2. Empowerment of PR within the dominant coalition or direct reporting to senior management.

3. An integrated PR function.

4. Recognition of PR as a distinct management function.

5. Leadership of the PR unit by a manager, not a technician.

6. Adoption of a two-way symmetrical (mixed motive) model of PR.

7. Possession of the necessary knowledge for symmetrical PR management.

8. A symmetrical system of internal communication.

9. Embodiment of diversity in all roles.

10. Adherence to ethics and integrity.

These principles guide the design and staffing of the PR function, enhancing its effectiveness. The acknowledgment of the role of PR by top executives and discovering what makes excellent public relations practice with regard to politics, is also critical for leveraging its potential impact on the organization's reputation and overall success of PRs practice.

2.10.3. Excellence Theory in the Context of Political Change and Public Relations in Ethiopia

The excellence theory, as articulated by Grunig (1992) and expanded by Botan and Trowbridge (2015), provides a foundational framework for understanding the role of public relations (PR) in organizational effectiveness within the dynamic political landscape of Ethiopia. This theory posits that PR contributes to organizational success when it fosters sustainable, quality relationships with strategic publics. Such relationships are particularly crucial in the face of political change, where organizations must be willing to adapt their behaviors and PR managers must be integral to decision-making processes.

In the Ethiopian context, where political shifts can significantly influence government communication strategies, the excellence theory underscores the necessity for PR to be

involved in strategic management. This involvement ensures that PR practices are aligned with the evolving political environment and stakeholder expectations. As Ethiopia undergoes political transformations, the role of PR becomes pivotal in interpreting and communicating the implications of these changes to both internal and external stakeholders.

Grunig's further development of the excellence theory (2006) emphasizes the societal and organizational value of PR, which is particularly relevant in Ethiopia's changing political climate. The theory advocates for socially responsible managerial decisions and the cultivation of robust stakeholder relationships. For government organizations in Ethiopia, this means engaging in practices that address the concerns of diverse publics affected by political decisions. High-quality, long-term relationships with stakeholders are valuable assets that can mitigate risks associated with political change, such as negative publicity, legal challenges, and decision-making uncertainties (Grunig, 2006; Toth, 2007).

The Excellence Study, led by Grunig, distilled essential variables into ten universal principles of excellent PR, which are applicable regardless of cultural or political contexts. These principles include strategic PR involvement, empowerment within the dominant coalition, and an integrated PR function (Vercic & Grunig, 1996). For Ethiopian government communication, these principles provide a blueprint for structuring PR functions that are responsive to political changes and capable of fostering effective stakeholder relationships.

Moreover, the political system's interaction with excellence theory highlights the unique challenges faced by PR practitioners in Ethiopia. The country's diverse political landscape necessitates a nuanced approach to public engagement. The excellence theory critiques the limitations of dominant coalitions in representing non-dominant or activist publics, which is particularly relevant in Ethiopia's pluralistic society. It calls for inclusive, ethical, and unbiased engagement of all discourses in two-way symmetrical communication, creating a space where marginalized voices can be heard and considered in the wake of political change, aligning with the principles of critical theory and ethical public relations practice (Tyma, 2008).

In summary, the excellence theory serves as a robust theoretical foundation for examining the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia. It provides a strategic framework for PR practitioners to

navigate the complexities of political transitions, ensuring that communication strategies are socially responsible, stakeholder-oriented, and conducive to organizational effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia. The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach is that it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem by leveraging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014). When designing a mixed methods study, three aspects must be considered: priority, implementation, and integration (Creswell, Plano Clark, Guttman, & Hanson, 2003). Priority refers to which quantitative or qualitative method was given the most importance in the study. Implementation means whether the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data takes place sequentially or chronologically, one after the other, in parallel or at the same time. Integration refers to the phase of the research process in which quantitative and qualitative data are mixed or combined (Creswell, 2002, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003). Therefore, among the various mixed methods designs, the study utilized an exploratory sequential design due to its suitability for developing a deep understanding of emerging phenomena where the literature may

be limited or nascent. This design is characterized by an initial qualitative phase of data collection and analysis, followed by a quantitative phase where the insights gained from the qualitative data inform the development of quantitative instruments and hypotheses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The rationale for choosing an exploratory sequential design lies in its ability to first explore the topic qualitatively to discern new variables or constructs that may not been previously measured (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In the context of this study, the qualitative phase allows for the discovery of how individuals frame their understanding around the impact of political change on the practice of public relations. This exploratory design is crucial for developing a comprehensive questionnaire or survey for the quantitative phase, ensuring that the instruments are grounded in the realities of the Ethiopian context.

In the first, qualitative phase, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication of Ethiopia. The qualitative data provided rich, contextual insights into the nuances of the influence of political change on the practice of public relations.

In the second, quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire was administered to a larger sample of public relations professionals working in government and private institutions. The survey instrument was designed to quantify the perceived impact of political change on various aspects of public relations practice, such as communication strategies, media relations, and stakeholder engagement. This phase allowed for the collection of numerical data that could be statistically analyzed to identify patterns and trends.

Finally, integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings occurred during the discussion stages of the research, where the results from both phases were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication of Ethiopia.

3.2. Sampling Technique and Population

The survey participants were meticulously selected using a purposive sampling technique, a method chosen for its ability to target specific individuals with expertise in PRs practices in Ethiopia. The inclusion criteria were stringent, requiring participants to

possess substantial experience or knowledge in the field. Efforts were made to guarantee a diverse representation of PRs practitioners and government communication specialists to capture a comprehensive spectrum of perspectives within the sample. In this regard, the researcher carefully chose the participants of the primary data collection both (in-depth interview) qualitative data and (questionnaire survey) quantitative data.

In the qualitative component of the study, seven participants were carefully chosen in purposive sampling technique to include a diverse range of roles within the field of public relations, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the practices across different organizational levels and political affiliations. The participants were drawn from both government communication offices and private institutions. The participants include, two (2) team leaders from the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO), two (2) senior public relations, communication, and media experts from the GCAO, two (2) heads of public relations departments from opposing political parties, one (1) head of private media communication. Hence, this non-probability sampling method was particularly suited for the research objectives, as it allowed to deliberately select individuals who could provide a rich, in-depth understanding of the subject matter as well as their extensive experience and critical roles in shaping the PRs landscape, particularly during the EPRDF era and the subsequent political transitions. This selection was intended to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives regarding the impact of political changes on public relations practices. The inclusion of participants from opposing political parties and different sectors helps in understanding the varied ways in which public relations strategies might be implemented in different political and organizational contexts.

For the quantitative component, the study focused on a population of public relations professionals actively involved in government communication within Ethiopia, specifically those who are knowledgeable about and directly involved in government communication. In this regard, the participants were chosen purposively using purposive sampling techniques, which method helps to choose the appropriate respondents accordingly to meet the objectives of the study. This includes 50 out of 100 respondents were PR officers within government communication of Ethiopia, 26 out of 100 respondents were from PR professionals working in various government ministries and agencies and also 24 out of 100 respondents were from PR practitioners employed in

private institutions, such as media organizations, consulting firms, and corporate communication departments. These individuals are directly engaged in public relations practice and involved in communication management of government communications in Ethiopia and thus provide valuable insights into the impacts of political changes on PR practices. Furthermore, because of the sensitivity of the study, the diversity of sample population helps to ensure a validity of the data and broad range of perspectives on the impact of political change on the practice of public relation in government communication of Ethiopia. Besides this, the sample representative's underscores the importance of considering various stakeholder views to understand the complex dynamics at play in public relations amidst political change.

3.3. Data Collection

Qualitative Component: The qualitative data collection involved conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven carefully chosen respondents. The interview questions were designed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding PRs practices under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rule and the subsequent changes post-2018. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility, ensuring that the nuances of participants' insights were captured.

All interviews were meticulously audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate thorough analysis. In-depth interview is a qualitative research tool used in providing ample opportunities to grasp the research elements' internal feelings, perspectives, interpretations, knowledge, opinions and life experiences (Ezzy, 2002; Stokes, 2003; Mack, N. et al 2005; Boyce, C. & Neale, P. 2006; Jensen, 2002;). N. et al (2005: 29).

In-depth interviews are more detailed; and as Wimmer and Dominick (2003: 127) argued, when compared to traditional survey methods, intensive in-depth interviews provide more accurate responses on sensitive issues. If they are intensive and well performed, they provide detailed background about the reasons why respondents give specific answers. It elaborates data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings.

In spite of being an effective tool to gather qualitative data, in-depth interview has a disadvantage as well. The disadvantages are, it is prone to bias, consumes time to analyze, information could be distorted through recall error, selective perceptions, desire

to please interviewer and people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Boyce, C. & Neale,P. 2006; Jensen, 2002).

As previously indicated, the aim of this study is to find out the perceived impact of political change in the practices of PRs in Government Communication. Therefore, interviewing the PRs practitioners and communicators in Government Communication Affairs Office and private institution was found to be the best method to achieve this. Hence, 8 interrelated interview questions were drawn from the research questions prepared under which the researcher grouped them into two. This approach served to build on respondents' proper understanding of the objectives of the study and to further investigate unseen factors hampering the practice of PRs. Accordingly, questions in the first group are categorized under the PRs practices during the EPRDF era and then, the second group questions fall under the impact of political changes on the practice of PRs after political transition in Ethiopia.

Quantitative Component: The quantitative data collection centered on the distribution of self-administered questionnaires among one hundred of professionals working in PRs. These professionals were asked to rate their responses on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey instrument was thoughtfully designed to address specific research questions and gather relevant data on PRs practices during the EPRDF era and the impact of political changes in Ethiopia. The design of the questionnaire was based the Likert-Scale type data collection. Hence, the participants were asked 14 items Likert scale measurement questions which touch on their insights of the impact of political change in the practices of PRs. These Likert-Scale items are simply-worded statements to which respondents can indicate their extent of agreement or disagreement on a five-scale ranging (Bhattacherjee, Anol, 2012).

3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative Data: The qualitative data obtained from the interviews underwent a rigorous thematic analysis. The transcribed interviews were scrutinized, coded, and themes were identified to reveal recurring patterns related to the research questions. These themes were systematically organized and interpreted to derive meaningful and nuanced insights into the impact of political change on the practice of PRs practice in Ethiopia, providing a rich qualitative understanding.

For qualitative data, the researchers use an inductive method: Data are collected relevant to some topic and are grouped into appropriate and meaningful categories; explanations emerge from the data themselves (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111).

There are five major thematic categories that this study would discuss; the role of public relations during EPRDF, Challenges faced during EPRDF, impact of political Changes, digital media utilization and relationship with journalists.

For qualitative one the data analyzed were explained in the form of narration and the researcher preferred to employ a simple code system (symbols/ signs) for responses gathered from key informants, to keep ethical standard of the research, therefore, their personal names were intentionally declined for the reason that they may feel insecure.

And then, the quantitative data, collected through the Likert-scale surveys, underwent analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to analyze and interpret the data. Furthermore, efforts were made to create visual understanding of the quantitative outcomes. Therefore, the researcher used table for the questionnaire's responses of survey participants. This quantitative approach ensures a statistical validation of findings, offering a robust and comprehensive understanding of the surveyed professionals' perspectives on the impact of political change on the practices of PRs in government communication of Ethiopia.

In general, Mixed-method approach ensures the triangulation of data, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the study.

Finally, the methodology employed in this study enables a comprehensive exploration of PRs practices in Ethiopia during the EPRDF era and the impact of political changes. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a deeper understanding of the research questions and contributes to the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality. The study also adhered to relevant ethical guidelines, safeguarding the rights and well-being of the participants.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Data Presentation

This academic research investigates the perceived impact of political change on public relations practices within Ethiopian government communication, focusing on the EPRDF era and subsequent transformations. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study amalgamates qualitative insights from interviews with seven respondents and quantitative data derived from Likert-scale surveys involving one hundred participants.

4.1.1. Qualitative Findings

The findings of the qualitative data are presented in thematic categories under the research questions. This data presentation includes a comprehensive summary of the

perspectives of participants and their arguments, followed by selected interview quotes to substantiate the summarized responses.

4.1.1.1. Practice of Public Relations in Government Communication of Ethiopia during the Rule of EPRDF

Role of Public Relations During EPRDF

The role of public relations (PR) in government communication during the rule of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is multifaceted and can be understood through several key perspectives gathered from participant interviews.

Several participants highlighted the strategic nature of PR in government communication. PR was viewed as a crucial tool for propagating the government's agenda and maintaining a positive public image. This perspective underscores the importance of aligning PR activities with the government's goals and objectives. By carefully crafting and disseminating messages, PR professionals were seen as instrumental in shaping public perception and ensuring that the government's narrative was positively received by the public.

Participant 1 summarized this standpoint by stating:

"Public Relations entail the strategic utilization of communication to propagate the government's agenda and maintain a positive public image."

Another critical perspective emphasized the role of PR in promoting transparency and accountability. Participants noted that effective PR practices are essential for ensuring that the government communicates openly with the public and remains accountable for its actions. This involves managing communication channels efficiently and providing accurate information to the public, thereby building trust and credibility.

Participant 2 highlighted this role, stating:

"PR professionals play a key role in ensuring that the government communicates transparently with the public and remains accountable for its actions."

From an operational perspective, PR professionals were described as being responsible for the day-to-day management of the government's communication strategies. This includes formulating key messages, coordinating media relations, and managing the

overall communication activities to ensure the government's messaging is effectively disseminated. This perspective highlights the practical and hands-on nature of PR work in government communication.

Participant 3 provided insight into this role:

"PR professionals are responsible for managing the government's communication strategies, formulating key messages, and coordinating media relations."

However, participants also pointed out that during the EPRDF rule, the practice of PR often became intertwined with political objectives. Instead of serving as a conduit for genuine public engagement, PR was predominantly employed as a tool for political propaganda and image-building. This involved promoting government accomplishments while downplaying or disregarding critical matters. The political environment thus posed significant challenges to impartial and transparent communication.

Challenges Faced during EPRDF:

The challenges faced by PR professionals during the EPRDF era were manifold. Participants reported several obstacles that hindered effective communication and the ability to perform their roles effectively.

One of the primary challenges highlighted was the stringent censorship and control over the media exercised by the government. This restricted the ability of PR professionals to convey their messages accurately and transparently. The lack of freedom of expression and media control created an environment where information was heavily monitored and often manipulated to serve the government's interests.

Participant 4 highlighted this issue:

"The government's control over the media and restrictions on free speech made it challenging for PR professionals to convey their messages accurately and transparently."

Another significant challenge was the complex and fragmented media landscape. Building relationships with journalists was difficult, and the media environment during the EPRDF era was often biased or fragmented. This made it challenging for PR professionals to foster positive relationships and ensure accurate coverage of government

activities. The difficulty in establishing rapport with journalists impacted the effectiveness of government communication.

Participant 5 pointed out this challenge:

"Building relationships with journalists was challenging in a complex media landscape, which influenced how effectively PR professionals could communicate."

Operating in a highly politicized environment, PR professionals frequently faced political pressures. Navigating the political landscape and dealing with competing interests posed significant challenges to effective communication. PR professionals had to balance the government's agenda with the political dynamics, ensuring their messages were effectively conveyed while managing external pressures.

Participant 6 discussed these pressures:

"Operating in a highly politicized environment, PR professionals often faced political pressures, having to balance the government's agenda with political dynamics."

Respondents consistently pointed out a lack of transparency and accountability as major obstacles. Information was perceived to be controlled and manipulated to serve the government's agenda rather than the public interest. Examples included restricted access to government officials for media interviews, limited flow of information, and censorship of critical voices. These challenges hindered effective communication, resulting in a lack of trust and credibility in public relations efforts.

Overall, the qualitative findings reveal a complex picture of the practice of public relations in government communication during the EPRDF era. While PR played a central role in shaping the narrative and reputation of the government, it was often used strategically to align with political objectives. The operational aspects of PR were crucial, but the challenges of censorship, media fragmentation, and political pressures significantly impeded the effectiveness of PR efforts. The lack of transparency and accountability further eroded trust and credibility, highlighting the difficulties faced by PR professionals in this context.

4.1.1.2. Effects of Political Change in Ethiopia on the Practice of Public Relations in Government Communication

Impact of Political Changes:

The political changes in Ethiopia have had a profound impact on the practice of public relations (PR) in government communication. The shift from EPRDF regime to a more open and democratic political system has introduced significant transformations in how government PR is conducted. Participants in the study unanimously agreed that these changes have had a positive effect on transparency and the overall quality of government communication.

The transition to a democratic system has enhanced the transparency and accountability of government communication. Participants noted that the previous regime was characterized by stringent censorship and limited freedom of expression, which hindered effective communication. In contrast, the new political environment has fostered a culture of openness and transparency. PR professionals now have greater freedom to convey messages accurately and transparently, which has led to increased public trust and credibility.

Participant 1 expressed this shift succinctly:

"The new political climate has created a space for us to engage in more transparent and sincere communication practices."

This sentiment was echoed by several other participants who emphasized that the new regime's commitment to democratic principles has allowed for more open communication channels. The ability to communicate transparently has not only improved public relations efforts but also strengthened the relationship between the government and the public.

Participant 2 highlighted the recognition of PR's role in ensuring transparency:

"There is now a heightened recognition of the crucial role PR plays in promoting transparency and accountability."

Participants pointed out that the government's increased willingness to share information and engage with the public has been a significant positive change. This has been facilitated by new policies that promote freedom of expression and reduce censorship, allowing PR professionals to provide more comprehensive and truthful information to the public.

Adapting to Emerging Technologies:

Another major impact of political changes is the increased focus on digital media and emerging technologies. Participants noted that the advent of digital media has revolutionized government communication, providing new platforms for engaging with the public and disseminating information. The shift towards digital communication has been driven by the need to reach a broader audience and interact with stakeholders in real-time.

Participant 3 indicated the dynamic nature of the field, stating:

"Professionals in the field need to adapt to advancements in technology, portraying a dynamic and evolving landscape in public relations."

Digital media platforms such as social media, blogs, and government websites have become crucial tools for PR professionals. These platforms allow for immediate feedback and direct engagement with the public, which is essential for building trust and credibility. The use of digital media also enables the government to respond quickly to public concerns and provide real-time updates on important issues.

Participant 6 shared their viewpoint on the impact of digital media:

"Digital media has revolutionized our approach to audience reach. It allows for greater engagement with a wider audience and enables us to interact with stakeholders in real-time."

Participants stressed the importance of staying updated with the latest digital trends and technologies. The ability to leverage digital media effectively is now seen as a critical skill for PR professionals. This involves not only using social media platforms but also understanding data analytics, content management systems, and other digital tools that can enhance communication strategies.

Participant 7 emphasized the strategic use of digital media:

"In order to effectively carry out our public relations efforts, it has become crucial to adapt to new technologies and leverage digital media strategically."

Relationship with Journalists:

Building strong relationships with journalists was identified as a strategic priority for effective government communication. Participants emphasized that fostering positive relationships with the media is crucial for ensuring accurate and fair coverage of government activities. However, they also acknowledged the complexities of media interactions, noting that journalists may have their own agendas and biases, which can pose challenges to PR professionals.

Participant 4 emphasized the importance of media relationships:

"Our ability to effectively convey our messages hinges upon the relationships we establish with journalists."

Participant 5 highlighted the complexities of media interactions:

"Navigating the complex media landscape and fostering trust with journalists is crucial for accurate and balanced coverage."

Participants noted that the relationship between PR professionals and journalists is mutually beneficial. Journalists rely on PR professionals for accurate and timely information, while PR professionals depend on journalists to disseminate their messages to the public. Building trust and maintaining open lines of communication with journalists are therefore essential components of effective public relations.

Examples and Illustrations:

Participants provided various examples and narratives to illustrate the positive effects of political changes on public relations. They highlighted specific instances where the new political climate facilitated more transparent and effective communication.

Respondent 1 expressed the overall sentiment:

"The new political climate has created a space for us to engage in more transparent and sincere communication practices."

Respondent 2 emphasized the greater acknowledgement of public relations in ensuring transparency and accountability:

"There is now a heightened recognition of the crucial role PR plays in promoting transparency and accountability."

Respondent 3 discussed the need for professionals in the field to adapt to advancements in technology:

"Professionals in the field need to adapt to advancements in technology, portraying a dynamic and evolving landscape in public relations."

Participants also reflected on the challenges they faced during the previous regime and how the new political environment has alleviated some of these issues. They described the difficulties of working under stringent censorship and the limitations on freedom of expression, contrasting these experiences with the current, more open environment.

Despite the positive changes, participants acknowledged that there are still challenges to be addressed. The media landscape remains complex, and there are ongoing efforts to build and maintain trust with journalists. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological change requires continuous learning and adaptation by PR professionals.

Participants highlighted the need for ongoing professional development and training to keep up with new digital tools and platforms. They also emphasized the importance of ethical considerations in using digital media, ensuring that information is disseminated responsibly and accurately.

The qualitative findings highlight the significant impact of political changes on the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia. The transition towards a more democratic system has enhanced transparency and accountability, enabling PR professionals to engage in more open and sincere communication. The importance of building strong relationships with journalists and adapting to emerging technologies, particularly digital media, was also emphasized. These changes have contributed to a more dynamic and evolving landscape in public relations, reflecting the need for PR professionals to continuously adapt and innovate in their communication strategies.

4.1.2 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis of this study focuses on two aspects, which are the main questions that the study aims to identify through the answers of the sample, namely: 1) how do you evaluate the practice of public relations in Ethiopia during the rule of EPRDF Party? 2) How have the political changes that happened in Ethiopia change the way

Gender of respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	male	66	66.0	66.0	66.0
	female	34	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

public relations are practiced? The results were obtained by using a method of analysis known as descriptive analytical approach, which can be described as an approach to analysis that focuses on gathering sufficient and correct information about a certain occurrence or topic or a known period. To achieve the scientific goals, obtain the results, and then interpret them in a manner that is objective and consistent with the real data of the phenomena (Raja Wahid, 2000, p.10). The questionnaires were given out to a total of one hundred professionals who work in the field of public relations. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to conduct the analysis on the collected data. These statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

4.1.2.1 Demography of Respondents

Table 1:Demographic frequency of respondent's

Age of respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	6	6.0	6.0	6.0
	25-34 years	42	42.0	42.0	48.0
	35-44 years	42	42.0	42.0	90.0
	45-54 years	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Educational status of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Degree of BA/BSc	90	90.0	90.0	90.0
	Degree of MA/MSc	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Profession of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public relations practitioner	84	84.0	84.0	84.0
	Other	16	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Occupation of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government employee	48	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Public relations practitioner	40	40.0	40.0	88.0
	Journalism/media professional	12	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

In conducting a comprehensive survey, a detailed analysis of the demographic profile of respondents offers valuable insights into the characteristics and perspectives of the surveyed population. The following narrative report encapsulates the key findings across various demographic dimensions:

The survey reveals a distinctive age distribution, with a predominant representation of individuals falling between the ages of 25 and 44, constituting a substantial 84% of the surveyed population. This age bracket suggests a sample that is predominantly in the middle-aged spectrum, indicating a concentration of respondents in the prime years of adulthood. This demographic detail is crucial for understanding the life stage and potential shared experiences that may influence the respondents' perspectives.

Notably, the survey exhibits a gender imbalance, with male respondents comprising 66% of the participants. This gender disparity prompts a closer examination of the dataset, highlighting the importance of considering diverse gender perspectives and experiences. Understanding how this gender skew may impact the survey results is crucial for drawing accurate and inclusive conclusions.

An in-depth exploration of the respondents' educational background reveals a compelling pattern. An overwhelming 90% of participants hold a Bachelor's degree (BA/BSc), indicating a high level of academic qualification within the surveyed sample. This educational depth is a significant factor to consider when interpreting the survey responses, as it suggests a well-educated and potentially informed group of participants.

Delving into the professional landscape, a substantial 84% of respondents identify themselves as Journalists/Public Relations practitioners. This insight into the occupational composition of the sample provides context for understanding the specific perspectives and expertise that may shape the survey responses. Additionally, Government employees emerge as the largest occupational group, comprising 48% of the surveyed population. This finding shed light on the sectors that significantly contribute to the overall makeup of the dataset.

In conclusion, this narrative report on the demographic profile of respondents serves as a foundational understanding of the survey's participant characteristics. These insights are instrumental in contextualizing and interpreting the subsequent survey results, allowing for a nuanced and informed analysis of the collected data.

4.1.2.2 Role of public relations in government communication during the rule of EPRDF

Table 2:The role of public relations in government communication during the rule of EPRDF

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation

	Moderate involvement and significance	36	36.0		
	Low involvement and significance	40	40.0		
	Not sure	24	24.0		
	Total	100	100.0	2.8800	.76910

In response to this question, the majority of respondents (36%) perceived the role of public relations in government communication during the rule of EPRDF as moderate, while 40% described it as low. A significant number of respondents (24%) were unsure about the level of involvement and significance of public relations. The average response was 2.88, indicating a moderate to low perception overall.

This finding suggests that there have been limitations and challenges in the role and impact of public relations in government communication under the EPRDF regime. The moderate to low perception aligns with the perception of limited involvement and significance of public relations in the government's communication strategies during this period.

Freedom of expression and access to the target audience in government communication during the rule of EPRDF

Table 3:Public relations freedom of expression and ease of access to the target audience during the rule of EPRDF in Ethiopia

Alternatives		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Agree	20	20.0		
	Disagree	60	60.0		

	strongly Disagree	20	20.0		
	Total	100	100.0	3.8000	.98473

The majority of respondents (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (20%) that public relations had freedom of expression and ease of access to the target audience during the rule of EPRDF. Only 20% agreed with this statement. The mean response was 3.8, indicating a disagreement on average.

This finding suggests that public relations practitioners faced challenges in terms of freedom of expression and reaching their intended audience during the rule of EPRDF. The disagreement among respondents may indicate restrictions on communication practices and limited access to the target audience, which potentially hindered effective public relations efforts.

Performance of scientific functions of public relations during the rule of EPRDF

Table 4: During the rule of EPRDF in Ethiopia, public relations practitioners performed all the functions of public relations in their scientific form.

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Agree	20	20.0		
Disagree	60	60.0		
strongly Disagree	20	20.0		
Total	100	100.0	3.8000	.98473

The majority of respondents (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed (20%) that public relations practitioners performed all the scientific functions of public relations during the rule of EPRDF. Only 20% agreed with this statement. The mean response was 3.8, indicating a disagreement on average.

This finding suggests that public relations practitioners may not have been fully engaged in performing the scientific functions of public relations, such as research, planning, and evaluation, during the rule of EPRDF. The

disagreement among respondents highlights a perception of limited application of strategic communication practices and potentially reduced effectiveness in government communication.

Communication channels used by the government during the rule of EPRDF

Table 5:Communication channels commonly used by the government during the rule of EPRDF to disseminate information

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Television	28	28.0		
Radio	18	18.0		
Print media (newspapers, magazines)	22	22.0		
Public events/rallies	32	32.0		
Online platforms/social media	_	_		
Other	_	_		
Total	100	100.0	2.9000	1.61120

According to the survey responses, the most commonly used communication channels by the government during the rule of EPRDF were public events/rallies (32%), television (28%), and print media (22%). The least commonly used channel was radio (18%). The mean response was 2.9.

This finding indicates that the government relied heavily on traditional communication channels, such as public events and television, while radio was less commonly utilized. The moderate mean response suggests a

somewhat balanced usage of various communication channels in government communication during the rule of EPRDF.

Transparency of government communication during the rule of EPRDF

Table 6:Transparency of government communication to be during the rule of EPRDF

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Very transparent	–	–		
Somewhat transparent	–	–		
Not transparent at all	76	76.0		
Not sure	24	24.0		
Total	100	100.0	3.2400	.42923

A large majority of respondents (76%) perceived government communication during the rule of EPRDF to have no transparency at all. 24% of respondents were unsure about the level of transparency. The mean response was 3.24, indicating a perception of low transparency on average.

This finding indicates a lack of transparency in government communication during the rule of EPRDF, as perceived by the respondents. The overwhelmingly negative perception of transparency suggests a need for improved openness and accountability in the government's communication strategies and practices.

Proactive engagement of the government in public relations efforts during the rule of EPRDF

Table 7: Government proactive engagement with the public through public relations efforts during the rule of EPRDF

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Yes, occasionally	12	12.0		
Yes, rarely	16	16.0		
No, never	66	66.0		
Not sure	6	6.0		
Total	100	100.0	3.6600	.76831

The majority of respondents (66%) indicated that the government never proactively engaged with the public through public relations efforts during the rule of EPRDF. 16% said rarely, 12% said occasionally, and 6% were unsure. The mean response was 3.66, indicating a perception of low levels of proactive engagement on average.

This finding suggests a lack of proactive engagement by the government in public relations efforts during the rule of EPRDF, as perceived by the respondents. The majority of respondents perceived minimal or no efforts were taken by the government to initiate communication and engage with the public. This lack of proactive engagement may have hindered effective two-way communication between the government and the public.

4.1.2.3 The practice of public relations in government communication after the political change in Ethiopia

Table 8:The change in the practice of public relations in government communication after the political change in Ethiopia

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation

	Very high	64	64.0		
	High	22	22.0		
	Medium	14	14.0		
	Total	100	100.0	1.5000	.73168

The majority of respondents (64%) rated the change in the practice of public relations in government communication after the political change in Ethiopia as very high, while 22% rated it as high. 14% of respondents rated the change as medium. The mean response was 1.5, indicating a perception of a very high level of change on average.

This finding suggests that the political change in Ethiopia has had a significant impact on the practice of public relations in government communication. The majority of respondents perceived a substantial transformation in the approach, strategies, and effectiveness of public relations efforts following the political change.

Effect of political changes in Ethiopia on the role and responsibilities of public relations practitioners in government communication

Table 9:Political changes in Ethiopia affected the role and responsibilities of public relations practitioners in government communication

Alternatives		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Yes, significantly	84	84.0		
	No, not at all	16	16.0		
	Total	100	100.0	1.3200	.73691

The vast majority of respondents (84%) believed that political changes in Ethiopia have significantly affected the role and responsibilities of public relations practitioners in government communication. 16% of respondents indicated no effect. The mean response was 1.32, indicating a perception of significant effect on average.

This finding suggests that the political changes in Ethiopia have had a substantial impact on the role and responsibilities of public relations practitioners in government communication. The overwhelming majority of respondents perceived significant changes in the expectations, influence, and responsibilities of public relations professionals following the political change.

Involvement of public relations professionals in the organization's decision-making process after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 10: The level of involvement of public relations professionals in the organization's decision-making process

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public relations professionals are more involved in decision-making	84	84.0		
Public relations professionals are less involved in decision-making	_	_		
No significant change in the level of involvement	_	_		
Public relations professionals have become marginalized	_	_		

Public relations professionals have become more influential	16	16.0		
Total	100	100.0	1.6400	1.47381

The majority of respondents (84%) believed that political changes in Ethiopia have led to public relations professionals being more involved in the organization's decision-making process. 16% believed that they have become more influential. The mean response was 1.64, indicating a perception of increased involvement on average.

This finding suggests that political changes in Ethiopia have resulted in an increased role and involvement of public relations professionals in the decision-making process of the government. This perceived increase in involvement may indicate recognition of the strategic importance of public relations in informing and shaping organizational decisions.

Emphasis on online platforms and social media in government public relations efforts after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 11:The communication channels used by the government in public relations efforts

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increased emphasis on traditional media channels				
No change in the emphasis on communication channels				
Decreased emphasis on traditional media channels				
Decreased emphasis on online platforms/social media				

Increased emphasis on online platforms/social media	100	100.0	2.0000	.00000
Not sure	–	–		

All respondents agreed that political changes have led to an increased emphasis on online platforms and social media in government public relations efforts. This finding indicates a significant shift in communication strategies and the recognition of the importance of digital platforms in reaching and engaging with the public following political changes in Ethiopia.

Change in the public's trust in government communication after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 12:The effects of political changes on the public's trust in government communication

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Somewhat increased trust	74	74.0		
No change in trust	16	16.0		
not sure	10	10.0		
Total	100	100.0	2.5600	1.20872

The majority of respondents (74%) believed that political changes have somewhat increased the public's trust in government communication. 16% of respondents indicated no change, and 10% were unsure. The mean response was 2.56, indicating a perception of some increase in trust on average.

This finding suggests that political changes in Ethiopia have had a positive impact on the public's trust in government communication, as perceived by the respondents. While the majority perceived only a slight increase in trust, it indicates a positive shift in public perception following the political changes.

Change in public participation in government communication efforts after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 13:The level of public participation in government communication efforts

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increased public participation	74	74.0		
no change in public participation	18	18.0		
not sure	8	8.0		
Total	100	100.0	1.6000	1.04447

Most respondents (74%) believed that political changes in Ethiopia have increased levels of public participation in government communication efforts. 18% of respondents saw no change, and 8% were unsure. The mean response was 1.6, indicating a perception of increased participation on average.

This finding suggests that political changes in Ethiopia have resulted in an increase in public participation in government communication efforts, as perceived by the respondents. The majority believed that the public now has increased opportunities to voice their opinions and engage in shaping government policies and decisions.

Change in transparency in government communication after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 14:The level of government transparency in communication

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation

Significantly increased transparency	74	74.0		
Somewhat increased transparency	_	_		
No change in transparency	26	26.0		
Somewhat decreased transparency	_	_		
Significantly decreased transparency	_	_		
Not sure	_	_		
Total	100	100.0	1.5200	.88169

The majority of respondents (74%) believed that political changes have significantly increased transparency in government communication. 26% of respondents perceived no change. The mean response was 1.52, indicating a perception of significantly more transparency on average.

This finding suggests that political changes in Ethiopia have had a significant positive impact on transparency in government communication, as perceived by the respondents. The majority believed that the government now operates with more open and accountable communication practices.

Adherence to ethical codes and standards of practice in public relations after political changes in Ethiopia

Table 15:The level of adherence to ethical codes and standards of practice in public relations within your organization

Alternatives	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Adherence has increased significantly	54	54.0		

Adherence has increased somewhat	_	_		
No significant change in adherence	46	46.0		
No significant change in adherence	_	_		
Adherence has decreased somewhat	_	_		
Total	100	100.0	1.9200	1.00182

Respondents were split on whether adherence to ethical codes and standards of practice in public relations has significantly increased (54%) or seen no significant change (46%) due to political changes. The mean response was 1.92, indicating a perception of increased adherence on average.

This finding indicates a mixed perception among respondents regarding the impact of political changes on the adherence to ethical codes and standards of practice in public relations. While a slight majority perceived an increase in adherence, a significant portion saw no substantial change. It suggests that there may be varying levels of ethical practices among public relations professionals following political changes in Ethiopia.

4.2. Discussions

This academic research examines the impact of political change on public relations practices within Ethiopian government communication. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with seven respondents and quantitative surveys of one hundred participants.

The qualitative analysis delves into the intricate dynamics of public relations (PR) practices during the rule of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), shedding light on the multifaceted relationship between public relation and political objectives. It unveils a narrative where public relation, instead of serving as a genuine conduit for public engagement, became deeply intertwined with the agenda of the ruling party, predominantly serving as a tool for political propaganda and image-

building. This strategic manipulation of information not only compromised the impartiality and transparency of communication but also poses significant challenges to the efficacy of public relations efforts within the government.

The qualitative findings paint a vivid picture of how public relation practices during the EPRDF rule were characterized by controlled dissemination of information, manipulation of narratives, and censorship of critical voices, all orchestrated to serve political interests rather than the broader public good. This aligns with the broader notion that in societies where political systems prioritize party objectives over public opinion, the nature of PR tends to be propagandistic and one-way in nature, devoid of the sophistication necessary for genuine engagement (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verčič, 2023).

Furthermore, the qualitative data underscores the inherent conflict of interest that arises when organizations, including governments, prioritize their political agendas over the interests of their diverse publics. In the case of Ethiopia under the EPRDF rule, government communication efforts were tailored primarily to build the image of the ruling party, often at the expense of fully addressing the public's interests and concerns.

However, amidst these challenges, there emerges a theoretical framework proposed by Grunig, advocating for symmetrical public relation practices that strike a balance between self-interest and concern for the interests of others. These symmetrical practices, grounded in principles of mutual understanding, negotiation, and relationship building, stand in contrast to asymmetrical forms of public relation, which are often associated with manipulation, domination, and exploitation (Grunig, 2001).

Yet, despite the theoretical underpinnings advocating for symmetrical PR practices, the practical reality during the EPRDF rule was one marked by restricted access to government officials for media interviews, limited flow of information, and censorship of critical voices. These challenges not only hindered effective communication but also eroded trust and credibility in government public relations efforts.

Quantitative data further corroborate these qualitative findings, indicating public relations practitioner faced challenges in terms of freedom of expression and reaching their intended audience during the rule of EPRDF. The disagreement among respondents indicates restrictions on communication practices and limited access to the target

audience, which potentially hindered effective public relations efforts. furthermore, findings also suggests that public relations practitioners were not fully engaged in performing the scientific functions of public relations, such as research, planning, and evaluation, during the rule of EPRDF. The disagreement among respondents highlights a perception of limited application of strategic communication practices and potentially reduced effectiveness in government communication.

These findings align with existing literature particularly Rensburg (2023) highlighting public relations challenges in authoritarian regimes, where PR is often constrained and instrumentalized to serve the interests of the ruling party or leader. In such settings, the limitations on professional practice become apparent, with public relation techniques being employed primarily as a form of propaganda rather than as a means to facilitate open dialogue and diverse perspectives.

The struggle faced by public relations practitioners in EPRDF regimes underscores the essential role of a democratic environment in fostering the principles of public relations. These findings align with the literature, as articulated by Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verčič (2003), emphasizes that the Western definition of public relations assumes a democratic political structure where competing groups seek legitimacy through public opinion and elections. Thus, the findings underscore the importance of recognizing the constraints faced by public relations in non-democratic settings, emphasizing the need for a conducive political climate to allow for ethical and effective public relations practices.

However, following the political changes in Ethiopia, the qualitative findings revealed a significant transformation in public relations practices. Participants described the new political climate as providing opportunities for more transparent and sincere communication practices. This aligns with scholarly discourse Ngirkudu (2023), resonates with our findings, emphasizing the transformative potential of political transitions on public relations practices, the empirical investigation conducted in this study corroborates the idea that political change can facilitate a positive shift not only in the practice of public relations but also in the management of public and private institutions. The link between political change, the development of laws, and the positive relationship between citizens and public institutions aligns with the transformative potential of democratic transitions. This implies that political change can serve as a

catalyst for enhancing the role of public relations in governance. Furthermore, Ngirkudu (2023) highlights the need for a more democratic environment to foster independence in public relations. Democratic settings provide a conducive space for public relations practitioners to engage in relationship building and contribute to social advancement. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing the pivotal role played by political contexts in shaping public relations dynamics, highlighting the need for adaptive strategies to navigate evolving socio-political landscapes.

The quantitative findings support the qualitative data that political changes in Ethiopia have resulted in an increase in public participation in government communication efforts. The majority of respondents perceived a substantial transformation in the approach, strategies, and effectiveness of public relations efforts following the political change. However public expectations about the government and politicians are influenced by an exponential increase in data and extreme connectivity that can contribute to greater demand for responsiveness, participation and transparency. Contrastingly, the findings align with the literature, Johnston and Sheehan (2020) had previously argued that PR in the 21st century necessitate the relevant actors to focus on measuring communication impact, response approaches to listening, behavioral insights associated with social and digital media and finally, professionalism. Consequently, effective government communication and reputation management depend on the application of trust-building practices, distribution of speakers' rights, resting on values that characterize conversation such as cooperation and the process should be value-led. PR does not only consider communication but should involve different stakeholders such as party donors, think tanks, activist and lobby groups.

In addition to the impact on public relations practices, this study also delves into the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists. Building relationships with journalists is crucial for successful communication, and the qualitative findings of this study recognized the importance of establishing trust with journalists. Navigating the complex media landscape and effectively conveying messages hinges upon these relationships. The findings align with the literature, Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2000) stated that for public relations professionals, "good working relationships with media personnel are always important for smooth functioning ..." (p. 395). And also in their book, On Deadline, Howard and Mathews (2000) stressed the need to practice

strategic media relations as part of an overall program of public relations and proposed several aspects of effective media relations, such as the characteristics of a good spokesperson.

Furthermore, the advent of digital media has revolutionized the field of public relations. The qualitative data acknowledged the transformative power of digital media in reaching a wider audience and engaging stakeholders in real-time. The strategic utilization of digital media has become crucial for effective public relations efforts in the modern landscape.

The quantitative findings of this study also support the qualitative data indicate that political changes in Ethiopia have led to an increased emphasis on online platforms and social media in government public relations efforts. This shift in communication strategies reflects the recognition of the importance of digital platforms in reaching and engaging with the public in the post-transition period. The findings align with the literature, Al-Saeed, 2022) conform that the new media offers instant communication and rapid exchange of information and opinions, while also minimizing physical and social barriers that impede communication in traditional media and also the literature (Alsharif et al., 2023) collaborate with the findings emphasize that the new media plays a vital role in enhancing public relations, particularly in government institutions, as observed through the attitudes and continuous efforts of public relations professionals to find the most effective ways and methods to serve customers and the public.

The mixed perceptions regarding adherence to ethical codes following political changes highlight the complex ethical considerations inherent in public relations practice. While some respondents perceive an increase in adherence, others see no substantial change, suggesting varying levels of ethical conduct among practitioners. This aligns with discussions on the ethical dilemmas faced by public relations professionals in balancing organizational interests with public expectations (Grunig, 2001). The findings underscore the importance of ethical reflexivity and professional integrity in navigating political transitions and upholding ethical standards amidst changing socio-political contexts. Furthermore, the findings also align with the literature (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Dejan Verčič, 2023) conform that the evolving ethical landscape in government communication raises challenges and ethical dilemmas for public relations practitioners, emphasizing the need for ethical conduct in public relations practice.

In conclusion, the discussion elucidates the intricate interplay between political contexts, public relations practices, and ethical considerations in government communication. The findings underscore the transformative potential of political changes in fostering transparency, accountability, and public engagement, while also highlighting the enduring challenges faced by public relations practitioners in navigating politically restrictive environments. Moving forward, a nuanced understanding of these dynamics is essential to promote ethical and effective public relations practices in diverse socio-political contexts, fostering democratic dialogue and accountable governance.

The synthesis of empirical findings with the literature on the impact of political change on public relations in government communication yields practical implications for practitioners and policymakers. Democratic transitions present opportunities for public relations to thrive, contributing to social advancement and fostering positive relationships between citizens and institutions. However, in authoritarian regimes, where constraints on professional practice are prevalent, public relations faces significant challenges.

The role of public relations in shaping and reflecting political change emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted endeavor. Strategies employed in democratic settings may need to adapt to the constraints faced in evolving or authoritarian political landscapes. Practitioners should be attuned to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by political transitions, recognizing the need for strategic communication that aligns with the evolving political climate.

As political systems evolve, public relations practitioners must navigate the complexities of media relations and relationship building. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the specific nuances of each political context, tailoring communication strategies accordingly. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the symbiotic relationship between political change and public relations, providing a foundation for future scholarship and informing strategic communication practices in government settings.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The introductory chapter sets the stage for the study by underscoring the vital role of public relations (PR) in the strategic management of government communication. It details how PR shapes public perceptions, manages organizational policies, and implements strategic communication initiatives, focusing specifically on Ethiopia, a nation with a complex political history transitioning from feudal autocracy and socialism to a federal democratic republic. These political transformations have had profound implications for the practice of PR in government institutions.

The chapter outlines the research problem, which stems from a noticeable gap in scientific studies addressing the impact of political changes on PR practices in Ethiopia. It also presents the research questions aimed to describe PR practices in government communication during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rule and identify changes post-political transition. The study's rationale is to assess the impact of political change on the practice of PRs in government communications of Ethiopia.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study utilizes an exploratory sequential design. The qualitative phase involves semi-structured interviews with 7 PR professionals, government officials, opposite political parties and media practitioners experienced in government communication. These interviews are transcribed and analyzed thematically. The quantitative phase involves a survey of 100 PR professionals in government and private sectors using a purposive sampling technique, utilizing Likert-scale questionnaires to quantify the perceived impact of political change on PR practices, including communication strategies, media Relations, and stakeholder engagement.

The chapter discusses the rationale for selecting mixed methods, participant access, and ethical considerations. It ensures the study's findings are robust and credible through rigorous validity and reliability checks.

The study reveals a complex relationship between PR and the political environment. During the EPRDF era, PR professionals faced challenges like censorship and lack of freedom of expression, limiting public and media engagement. Quantitative data indicate low perceived significance of PR during this period, with government communication relying heavily on traditional channels with minimal proactive public engagement.

Post-political changes have transformed the PR landscape, allowing for more ethical and participatory practices. Respondents noted a significant shift towards transparency, digital media usage, and involvement in decision-making. Public trust in government communication has increased, along with greater public participation.

In Conclusion, PR can play a strategic role in fostering accountable and inclusive governance if practiced independently and with integrity. Upholding principles of transparency, public dialogue, and engagement is crucial for rebuilding credibility. Government bodies should leverage PR for participatory policymaking and two-way communication. Adapting to new technologies and online platforms can enhance outreach. Despite remaining challenges, the findings Indicate progress towards a democratic communication model, presenting opportunities to strengthen Ethiopia's democracy through ethical, people-centered PR practices in government.

5.2 Conclusion

This study indicates that the political change that has occurred in Ethiopia has a positive impact not only on the practice of public relations but will also affect the way in which public and private institutions are managed, especially if it is evaluated in a way that contributes to the development of laws and legislations that help building state institutions and contribute to creating a positive relationship between the citizen and public institutions.

The complex environment helps to enhance the importance of public relations as a strategic administrative function, because public relations is an administrative function that works to create harmony and compatibility between societies in general and between institutions and their societies in specific, and this is what Ethiopia needs now that the Ethiopians society has lost confidence between them as well as in public institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to give the necessary importance to public relations departments to work to bring the views of the components of Ethiopians society, as well as between institutions and their audience, and this requires research through a higher interaction with the masses. This is what the

respondents indicated that public relations with this change need to be an administrative function more than what was seen as a communicative function represented only in the protocol activity in most public institutions. the change is more achievable when it is supported by the legal system, therefore, new laws and legislations must be developed for public relations departments in institutions to help achieve the goal of public relations, which is to create compatibility between the components of society and thus achieve the desired goal, which is the establishment of a democratic system in Ethiopia.

This study supports the concept of public relations as an administrative and social activity that helps institutions to manage crises and address social issues. This study also supports the need for public relations departments to contribute to the democratic transition by urging public and private institutions to provide more services, job opportunities and education to the community in general. Thus, expanding the circle of participation and directly representing more communities in the institutions.

This study indicates that the environment directly affects the practice of public relations, especially during political change. The study also emphasizes the importance of continuous training and education of public relations practitioners to deal with environmental change, especially political change. Therefore, public relations practitioners who work in government communication should consider that successful public relations practice will be measured by its contribution to social advancement and the creation of harmony and consensus among the components of society.

5.3 Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to improve public relations practices in Ethiopia, particularly in the context of political changes. These recommendations are aimed at enhancing communication effectiveness, professional development and adaptation to technological advancements and also to address the perceived limitations in the PRs practice during the rule of the EPRDF era. This can be achieved through initiatives aimed at promoting transparency, openness, and inclusiveness in government communication. Encourage dialogue, active engagement, and feedback mechanisms to foster a more responsive and participatory communication environment.

Acknowledge and address the perception that public relations practitioners did not fully perform all the functions of public relations in their scientific form during the EPRDF era. Provide professional development opportunities, including training programs and workshops, to enhance the skills and knowledge of PR practitioners. Emphasize the importance of ethical practices, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and effective messaging within the field of public relations.

Recognize the dynamic and evolving landscape of public relations by encouraging professionals in the field to adapt to advancements in technology. Invest in digital communication tools and platforms that facilitate more efficient and targeted communication. Foster digital literacy and provide training on utilizing social media, online analytics, and other digital tools to enhance communication strategies.

Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among public relations practitioners in Ethiopia. Establish professional networks, forums, and conferences where PR professionals can exchange ideas, best practices, and experiences. Encourage the creation of professional associations and industry standards to promote accountability, professionalism, and continuous improvement within the field.

Encourage continuous research and monitoring of public relations practices in Ethiopia. This will help to stay updated on emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities within the field. Regular research can provide insights into the effectiveness of communication strategies, the impact of political changes, and the evolving needs of stakeholders. The findings from such research can inform evidence-based decision-making and contribute to the advancement of the public relations profession in Ethiopia.

Recognize the significance of building and maintaining strong relationships with journalists and media professionals. Encourage regular interactions, mutual understanding, and collaboration between public relations practitioners and media representatives. This can contribute to a more accurate, balanced, and transparent dissemination of information to the public.

By implementing these recommendations, Ethiopian public relations practices can evolve to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by political changes and advancements in technology. These measures will contribute to the promotion of transparency, accountability, and effective communication within the government and

public sectors, ultimately fostering trust and strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

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Appendix-1: Demographic frequency of respondent's

Table 1: Demographic frequency of respondent's

Age of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	6	6.0	6.0	6.0
	25-34 years	42	42.0	42.0	48.0
	35-44 years	42	42.0	42.0	90.0
	45-54 years	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Gender of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	66	66.0	66.0	66.0
	female	34	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Educational status of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Degree of BA/BSc	90	90.0	90.0	90.0
	Degree of MA/MSc	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Profession of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public relations practitioner	84	84.0	84.0	84.0
	Other	16	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Occupation of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government employee	48	48.0	48.0	48.0
	Public relations practitioner	40	40.0	40.0	88.0
	Journalism/media professional	12	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Appendix-2: Interview questions

Here are several potential interview questions that could be asked in relation to the impact of political change on the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia.

1. How would you define the role of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia during the rule of EPRDF?

2. Can you describe any specific challenges or obstacles that were faced in the practice of public relations during the rule of EPRDF?

3. What changes have you observed in the practice of public relations in government communication after the political changes in Ethiopia?

4. How has the political change in Ethiopia impacted the relationship between government communicators and journalists?

5. Have you noticed any changes in the level of transparency and openness in government communication after the political changes in Ethiopia?

6. How has public opinion towards government communication and public relations changed in Ethiopia following the political changes?

7. In your opinion, what are the key factors influencing the practice of public relations in government communication in Ethiopia currently?

8. Do you believe that public relations in government communication in Ethiopia are effectively serving the needs of the public? Why or why not?

Appendix-3: Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Information

Please indicate your age:

1. 18-24 years
2. 25-34 years
3. 35-44 years
4. 45-54 years
5. 55 years and above

Gender:

1. Male
2. Female

Please indicate your academic background:

1. Certificates
2. Diploma
3. Degree of BA/BSc
4. Degree of MA/MSc
5. PhD

Your profession

1. Public relations practitioner
2. Nurses and related professional
3. Accountants and related professional
4. Other (please specify)

Occupation:

1. Government employee
2. Public relations practitioner
3. Journalism/media professional
4. Academia/researcher
5. Student
6. Other (please specify)

Section 2: Practice of Public Relations in Government Communication during the rule of EPRDF

1) How would you describe the role of public relations in government communication during the rule of EPRDF?

1. High involvement and significance
2. Moderate involvement and significance

3. Low involvement and significance
4. Not sure

2) During the rule of EPRDF in Ethiopia, did public relations have freedom of expression and ease of access to the target audience?

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

3) During the rule of EPRDF in Ethiopia, did public relations practitioners perform all the functions of public relations in their scientific form?

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

4) Which communication channels were commonly used by the government during the rule of EPRDF to disseminate information? (Please select all that apply)

1. Television
2. Radio
3. Print media (newspapers, magazines)
4. Online platforms/social media
5. Public events/rallies
6. Other (please specify)

5) How transparent do you perceive the government communication to be during the rule of EPRDF?

1. Very transparent
2. Somewhat transparent
3. Not transparent at all
4. Not sure

6) Did the government proactively engage with the public through public relations efforts during the rule of EPRDF?

1. Yes, frequently
2. Yes, occasionally
3. No, rarely
4. No, never
5. Not sure

Section 3: Impact of Political Changes on the Practice of Public Relations in Government Communication

7) How would you rate the change in the practice of public relations in government communication after the political change in Ethiopia?

1. Very high
2. High
3. Medium
4. Low
5. Very low

8) Have political changes in Ethiopia affected the role and responsibilities of public relations practitioners in government communication?

1. Yes, significantly
2. Yes, to some extent
3. No, not at all
4. Not sure

9) How has political change affected the level of involvement of public relations professionals in the organization's decision-making process?

1. Public relations professionals are more involved in decision-making
2. Public relations professionals are less involved in decision-making
3. No significant change in the level of involvement
4. Public relations professionals have become marginalized
5. Public relations professionals have become more influential

10) How have political changes influenced the communication channels used by the government in public relations efforts?

1. Increased emphasis on traditional media channels
2. Increased emphasis on online platforms/social media
3. No change in the emphasis on communication channels
4. Decreased emphasis on traditional media channels
5. Decreased emphasis on online platforms/social media
6. Not sure

11) To what extent do you believe political changes have affected the public's trust in government communication?

1. Significantly increased trust
2. Somewhat increased trust
3. No change in trust
4. Somewhat decreased trust
5. Significantly decreased trust
6. Not sure

12) How have political changes influenced the level of public participation in government communication efforts?

1. Increased public participation
2. Decreased public participation
3. No change in public participation
4. Not sure

13) How have political changes in Ethiopia influenced the level of government transparency in communication?

1. Significantly increased transparency
2. Somewhat increased transparency
3. No change in transparency
4. Somewhat decreased transparency
5. Significantly decreased transparency
6. Not sure

14) How has political change affected the level of adherence to ethical codes and standards of practice in public relations within your organization?

1. Adherence has increased significantly
2. Adherence has increased somewhat
3. No significant change in adherence
4. Adherence has decreased somewhat
5. Adherence has decreased significantly