SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: A STUDY OF TWO AGENCIES IN KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my dearest children, Adriana Esther and Alvin Jeremiah for being

the greatest motivation behind my determination to study.

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ABSTRACT

Social media has revolutionised the entire spectrum of public relations (PR) practice globally and practitioners are under growing pressure to optimize on it for the benefit of their various organizations. On this backdrop, the study explored the use of social media in the PR practice by two agencies in Kenya. The study was guided by three specific objectives including, to examine how PR professionals use social media in their daily practice in Kenya, to identify challenges that come with the use of social media by PR professionals and to evaluate the perceptions held by PR professionals on the use of social media. To contribute to this, the study was informed by Grunig and Hunts theory of Public Relations (1984) which illustrated the industries various management and organizational practices. A qualitative approach was employed in the study hence a case study of two PR firms in Kenya. Purposive sampling technique was employed to identify 10 public relations practitioners spread across two PR firms based in Nairobi. In depth interviews supplemented by document analysis were used to generate data. The data was then analyzed thematically in correspondence with the research questions. The findings of the study indicate that PR firms use social media for brand visibility, content creation and marketing, crisis communication and to build relationships with their target audiences and other professionals such as journalists and the media at large. However, the study revealed that in spite of the opportunities that social media has offered practitioners to engage effectively with their stakeholders, it has also posed a number of challenges to practitioners, including integrating both traditional and new media to any PR strategy. The emergence of social media opinion shapers known as influencers and in addition the rise of citizen journalists has posed a challenge to the social media aspect in the PR practice. Undistinguishable policy guidelines and regulations concerning social media have also emerged as a challenge in use of social media in the PR practice in Kenya. The study also revealed that PR practitioners are yet to fully take advantage of social media in enhancing the practice due to the belief that social media is informal and frivolous. There is need for PR practitioners to consider social media as an innovative, viable and inevitable option in engaging with the more enlightened audiences in Kenya. The importance of a well-crafted public relations strategy that includes social media as a key function has become a necessity to the PR practice. This includes not just generating social media coverage and visibility but also fostering meaningful relationships with stakeholders and the public. The study contributes to literature in the PR practice generally and offers a scholarly resource on the utilization of social media in the PR practice in the Kenyan context specifically.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAKE	-	Bloggers Association of Kenya
CIPR	-	Chartered Institute of Public Relations
CSR	-	Corporate Social Responsibility
CCK	-	Communications Commission of Kenya
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
KOT	-	Kenyans on Twitter
MCK	-	Media Council of Kenya
MDG	-	Millennium Development Goals
MTN	-	Mobile Telecommunications Network
NGO	-	Non Governmental Organisation
OMM	-	Online Media Monitoring
ORM	-	Online Reputation Management
PESO	-	Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned
PR	-	Public Relations
PRO	-	Public Relations Officer
PRSA	-	Public Relations Society of America
PRSK	-	Public Relations Society of Kenya
SM	-	Social Media
SNS	-	Social Networking Sites
UGC	-	User Generated Content
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Program
WWW	-	World Wide Web

DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

The following is a list of key terms used in this Thesis and how they are operationalised:

Audience - Represents a group or groups to whom a public relations strategy or campaign is directed.

Caption - A brief explanation or title accompanying a picture, cartoon, an illustration or advertisement.

Channel –Is allocation on television dial through which a station can be received. In communication, a channel can be described as the means or medium through which people communicate.

Organisation–Is an entity that comprises of one or more people with the same purpose. Can be an institution, government body, profession or association concerned with a specific cause such as culture, education or health.

Media –These are the communication outlets that are used to store or deliver information. Common forms of media compriseof print (newspapers, books, magazines, speeches), broadcast (radio, TV), advertising (cartoons, brochures, posters, billboards) and new media (internet, websites and emails).

Media Pitch – This is the attempt to get a journalist or media house interested in your story.PR professionals mostly pitch their content to reporters, editors, bloggers or social media influencers. Pitches offer a brief and compelling explanation on a particular issue attracting media attention.

Press Release - This is a written form of communication that aims to report on very specific information in the briefest way possible. Press releases are drafted by PR professionals in the PR context. They are used to pass information on upcoming

events, product launches or celebrations. They also address issues such as breaking news and crisis management.

Publics- These are groups of individual people with common interests, characteristics, and ideologies. They include clients, employees, governments, stakeholders, clients, management, investors, suppliers, the media and opinion shapers.

Screenshot –This is animage of the data displayed on the screen of a computer or mobile device

Technology–Is the knowledge put into practical use to solve problems or challenges. It consists of the use of tools and techniques in public relations that make communication by PR professionals more efficient, easier and more productive.

Web–Also known as the world wide web (www) is a system of internet servers that support only special types of documents, texts or graphics. This is a platform through which PR professionals can get to communicate their messages out online or through the internet.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the background information of the study. It includes the problem statement, aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, scope, justification and significance of the study.

1.2   Background to the Study

Given the significant growth of social media in Kenya, this study sought to investigate how Public Relations (PR) practitioners are utilizing this platform to communicate information or messages to their audiences in their daily practice. The study was specifically conducted at two PR Agencies in Nairobi, Kenya. This study was of interest to the researcher since the official use of social media has massively transformed the PR practice worldwide introducing new dynamics. Additionally, how PR professionals communicate using social media to their publics has captured the attention of scholars globally.

PR is practiced across various industries ranging from the government to private sector. The main role of the PR agency is to establish and sustain relationships that are important to an organization and its objectives through their communication, planning and management. For a PR practitioner to maximize on social media use, it has become inevitable to linksocial media platforms to the public relations strategy. For example, on a picture posted on an organization's Instagram handle, the client's media release can be captioned together with the pictures description.

Before the emergence of the world wide web(www), the history of PR had followed a traditional path. Previously, PR practitioners entirely relied on traditional media such as TV, radio, newspapers, brochures, magazines and billboards to communicate to their audiences without using any form of internet technology. As such, it has evolved tremendously following the availability of a number of tools such as social media that assist PR practitioners to run their campaigns more effectively. Although traditional media is still used to propagate information, the online conversation has become the main medium of communication amongst PR practitioners.

Social media has enabled PR practitioners to interact with their target audiences without restraint by offering multiple ways in which they can reach and engage with them. However, it has become evident that PR practitioners are grappling with the dawn of social media which is driving change at a dizzying rate as a result posing challenges for them. Solis and Breakenridge (2009) indicate that social media has altered the entire public relations landscape by putting the power of influence in the hands of ordinary people who want to share their feelings, opinions and experiences and by this, new media plays the role of an extension of traditional word of mouth communication (Cernicova, 2016). To distinguish social media from traditional media, Knight and Cook (2013) describe it as a form of media whose prime role is interaction rather than just dissemination of information.

Notably, social media has evolved into a major channel for regular interactions and development of brand and customer relationships introducing new perspectives to the PR industry. Tancer (2008) in effect records that social media has overtaken pornography as the number one use of the Internet. Social media has had a profound effect to the PR

industry as an authorized communication tool significantly altering the way that PR agencies communicate and share information. This study therefore sought to establish how social media can be used as a strategic tool in order to approach its management, planning and growth in the best way possible. To put the issue of social media utilization among PR professionals into perspective, a detailed background was provided below. This background explores social media usage in PR globally, in Africa and locally.

1.2.1 The Global Situation

Public relations (PR) as a discipline dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and is strongly linked to the growth of the media (print, TV, radio, online) when it begun to influence actions, behavior and policy (Butterick, 2011). Social media is constantly evolving hence there is need for PR practitioners to scramble to stay on top of the latest trends and innovations. The increase in global trade and statistics as a whole further present the need and urgency with which PR practitioners and scholars should strive to understand the role of social media in the PR practice which this study sought to address.

The year 2011 witnessed an upward surge globally in social media usage. Facebook passed 750 million users, LinkedIn had over 100 million members, Twitter had over 177 million tweets per day, and YouTube reached three billion views per day (Chen & Bryer, 2012). From then on, social media has witnessed an upward trend arousing the interest of scholars worldwide. According to Schultz (2016) the amount of data created on the internet each day globally is extremely large: 500 million Tweets, more than four million hours of content uploaded to YouTube, 3.6 billion Instagram likes, 4.3 billion Facebook

messages posted daily, 5.75 billion Facebook likes, 40 million Tweets shared and 6 billion daily Google searches.

According to Global Digital Statistics (2018), it was estimated that there would be around 2.77 billion social media users around the globe by the end of 2019 up from 2.46 billion in 2017 (Tench and Yeomans, 2018). These Statistics further indicated that as of June 2018, 55.1% of the world's population would have internet access. As of January 2020, the global social media usage rate stood at 49 percent. More than 4.5 billion people now use the internet, while social media users have passed the 3.8 billion mark. (Digital 2020 Global Overview Report). This indeed confirms that the statistics have exceeded the predicted trends.
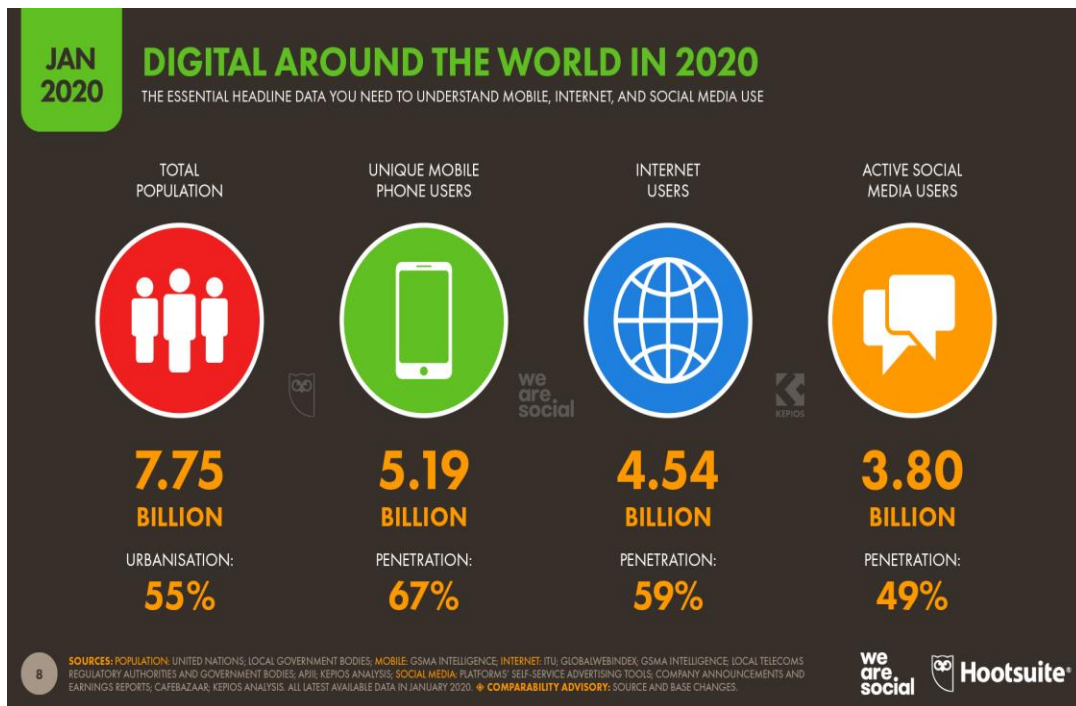
Figure 1.1: Social media statistics Source: Digital 2020 Global Overview Report

With the world embracing and adapting to the social media function, it is more than evident that social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, twitter, Instagram, snapchat, Skype amongst others are used extensively for the purpose of communication. This form of communication can be with a person or a group of persons. Facebook, for example, reported having 2.38 billion monthly active users and 1.56 billion daily active users as of March 31, 2019 (Facebook 2019).Globally, the total number of social media users is estimated to grow to 3.29 billion users in 2022, which will be 42.3% of the world's population (e Marketer 2018).

Social media comprises of a number of elements in communication hence PR firms have had to broaden the scope of their organizations. Multinational organizations such as Coca-Cola, IBM, McDonalds, Google, General Motors, General Electric, Virgin Group, GlaxoSmithKline and many others are expanding their functions to hitherto unchartered territories while using PR practitioners to build relationships with their publics on matters social media (McNamara, 2016). The PR industry has evolved to become an important worldwide multi-billion-dollar industry and is regarded as an integral part of both businesses and governments (Theaker, 2008). Butterick (2011) in addition, notes that, the importance of the profession has been remarkably influenced by the demand of the 24-hour media for content**.**

In a study done by the International Netherlands Group - ING (Torossian, 2016), it was reported that 81% of PR professionals felt that they can no longer do their job without social media. 78% of them felt social media was important to their daily work. On the flip side, 78% of journalists felt that they can no longer do their job without social media.

50% of them admitted that when they used social media, they did not feel the need to fact check. By and large, the way PR practitioners conduct their operations will continue to evolve as the demand for social media services by PR agencies continues to rise tremendously.

Of importance to note, is how the social media impact has become a force to reckon with amongst PR practitioners. There have been incidents whereby even PR practitioners themselves have misused and miscalculated the impact of social media. Broderick (2013) gives an example of Justine Sacco, a PR Director for Interactive Corp (IAC) who in 2013 published this tweet before boarding a flight to Cape Town, South Africa: Going to Africa. 'Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding! I'm white!' In merely an hour, the tweet went viral worldwide without her realizing it. IAC released the following statement, saying: The offensive comment does not reflect the views and values of IAC. We take this issue very seriously, and we have parted ways with the employee in question.

1.2.2   The African Situation

In the African continent, the application of PR techniques can be traced to the beginning of the African civilisation. According to Rodney (2009), the concept of PR was practiced in Africa before the era of colonialism. In ancient Egypt, the pharaohs proclaimed their achievements through word-pictures on impressive monuments (Robert, 2005). The African economic growth story has indeed presented opportunities for a multitude of communication disciplines including PR. However, countable academic studies targeting social media and PR have been carried out despite the region showing remarkable potential and growth of international PR. By totaling more than 388 million internet users

(Internet World Statistics, 2018), the continent presents significant potential for digital activity development. Today, PR agencies need to do a lot of research and understand the dynamics of the African continent, the pitfalls and the opportunities that social media presents so as to successfully operate in African region. Each country in Africa has its unique landscape, forcing PR practitioners to be tactful and open minded when executing their strategies, specifically those that are social media related. Social media has become a part of everyday life for Africans as it assists to maintain social ties and forge new connections in a whole new way.

The research noted that telecom and technology giants such as Google and MTN have managed to access some remote areas in Africa, by extending access to broadband. However, PR practitioners in Africa are still faced by a myriad of challenges such as poor infrastructure, media ownership, policy and regulatory matters as well as security risks. Due to these challenges, PR practitioners have had to resort to strategies such as facilitating direct communication between their clients and the key decision makers in that specific country besides engaging in more rigorous and interactive campaigns. PR professionals have had to explore options such as micro-targeting and befriending influencers in individual communities as a strategy that has worked well in several countries and cultures, too.

1.2.3   The Kenyan Situation

In Kenya, social media gained impetusin 2008 after the post-election violence that wreaked havoc in the country. People began to actively use Facebook where they could update each other on what was happening in their location. Prior to Facebook, popular

platforms at the time were Myspace and Yahoo (Naom 2013). Consequently, Public Relations (PR) is now a rule rather than the exception in any focused organisations communication mix (Oneya 2010). Mbeke (2009) acknowledges that most corporate organizations in Kenya have come to the realization that PR is an indispensable tool in the process of building relationships with key publics and that an effective PR strategy can therefore explore the use of social media in creating and building up the image of an individual or organization.

Today, Kenya has a population of about 52 million and with 27 percent residing in urban areas and accessing the internet, it must be an issue of consideration (Sunday, 2018). The high penetration of the internet has further enhanced social media handling as the demand for PR and by extension social media services has evidently gone a notch higher due to the rising number of international organizations setting up shop in the country. Major global PR agencies with established offices in Nairobi, Kenya such as Edelman, Apex Porter Novelli, Hill and Knowlton, Ogilvy and Mather among others have adopted social media into their core strategy towards approaching their PR plans and campaigns. This has seen the creation of positions directly linked to the social media function such as digital marketers, big data specialists and Chief Listening Officers (CLO) whose main role is to keep a keen eye on organizations social media activities.

The Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) was established in 1971 after the need to establish a professional body that would bring together PR practitioners in Kenya besides guiding them in their daily practice arose. According to PRSK, Kenya has 54 registered PR agencies that operate at different levels of capacity and offer a diverse range of

services to clients within Kenya and the East African Region (PRSK 2018). Naom (2013) notes how the PR profession in Kenya has grown as is evidenced by the increased number of job opportunities, consultancies and academic institutions offering Public Relations as a course. Over the years, the public and private sector are continually embracing PR as a strategic means towards achieving their goals. These developments have further witnessed the creation of PR departments within several organisations which previously never existed. In respect to academic institutions, a number of universities and colleges are currently offering PR courses which seek to develop well rounded practitioners whose theoretical knowledge is applicable to the current practice and trends such as social media.

Latest figures from the Communications Authority of Kenya, indicate that internet penetration in Kenya stands at about 86 percent. There are 51.1 million Internet users which was a 12.5% jump in the first quarter of 2017. Internet use in Kenya has experienced tremendous growth due to the wide adoption of mobile phones, 3G/4G network rollout and the laying of fiber optic cables countrywide. Due to the efforts of PRSK to instill excellence in the practice of public relations, Kenyan PR practitioners have made great progress towards communicating deeply ingrained principles of the profession to top corporate management (Maina, 2017). Managers have continued to appreciate the value of public relations in the organization and the role it plays in making the society a better place for everyone he adds.

Following the above statistics and illustrations, PR practitioners both locally and globally are undeniably caught in the dilemma of the best appropriate approaches and strategies to

use when handling social media. They have to adjust to the social media wave or be rendered out of business. The matter that comes to attention is how PR professionals should best handle the most dominant social media platforms in use by Kenyans such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

1.3   Statement of the Problem

Public Relations agencies in Kenya have had to broaden the scope of their organizations by integrating social media into their daily practice. Many PR agencies have fallen victim of their PR campaigns that have greatly incorporated the use of social media (Trench, 2017).Its use has changed the way that PR practitioners communicate with their clients, stakeholders, communities and governments besides impacting nearly every industry. If used well, social media offers precise targeting capabilities and remains relatively affordable and accessible compared to traditional PR approaches.

Social media has presented an easier, friendlier and easily accessible opportunity for organizations to communicate with their target audiences hence organizations that are yet to embrace a strategic social media presence are faced by a myriad of challenges. Its exponential growth shows no signs of slowing down and it is therefore up to PR practitioners to adapt or loose out on its various opportunities. According to Richard Edelman, CEO to one of the world's largest independent PR agency, Edelman, social media has altered the nature of how PR practitioners do what they do. It is a shift from pitching to participating, from selling a story to telling a story (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009). With many organizations in Nairobi experiencing communication challenges, PR agencies through their PR practitioners can offer social media services as a way of

determining an organizations brand and image. The study was therefore necessary based on the fact that social media has grown and spread very fast compared to other areas in the history of public relations.

In a nutshell, complaints from organizations and clients that PR agencies attend to, outdated procedures in the very rapidly evolving social media craze, lack of social media policies, heavy beauracracy and protocol to addressing emerging social media issues have undermined social media use by PR agencies. This therefore signifies the need for more research so as to establish how PR professionals can adapt to the ever growing and dynamic social media aspect to achieve more leverage in their practice. A research gap has therefore been identified regarding social media use by PR practitioners in Kenya which this study attempted to fill in. Further research exploring social media use and its best practices can assist PR practitioners and scholars to shed some light in defining social media roles and practices.

In conclusion, the above knowledge consequently happened the researcher's interest and inspired them to study social media incorporation to the PR practice in Kenya. The researcher therefore decided to further investigate it in their academic research. The research sought answers from PR practitioners on social media use in their daily practice and recommended strategic options. It also sought to understand the challenges and perceptions encountered by PR practitioners so as to ensure a better approach while handling social media.

1.4   Aim of Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the utilization of social media by PR practitioners and make recommendations towards effective use.

1.5   Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

i)   Examine how PR practitioners use social media in their daily practice in Kenya.

ii)   Identify the challenges that come with social media use by PR practitioners.

iii) Evaluate the perceptions held by PR practitioners regarding social media use.

1.6   Research Questions

A set of questions were chosen to help achieve the objectives this research sought to find. The questions were based generally on social media use, challenges and strategies by PR professionals. The questions asked tried to determine whether the PR professionals interviewed were using social media procedures to their full potential. The questions were as follows:

i)   How do PR agencies use social media in their practice in Kenya?

ii)   What are the challenges faced by the PR practitioners when using social media?

iii) What perceptions are held by PR professionals on social media use in the PR practice?

1.7   Scope of the Study

In this study, the researcher covered three aspects of the scope. These are: content scope, context scope, and methodological scope.

1.7.1   Content Scope

The researcher sought to investigate what led to social media use `among PR professionals as an official communication tool, the nature of the social media platforms they use and in addition, how they control and track movement of its use. The researcher focused on understanding the challenges encountered by PR professionals while effecting social media and whether they are any rules, policies, structures and decision making processes in place regarding social media use. Furthermore, the researcher sought to address whether the kind of training and skills held by PR practitioners is relevant in handling social media. The researcher explored various ways in which social media is used by PR practitioners and further explored the following: are there any strategic approaches in place for managing social media to enhance PR? Considering the very fast nature of social media, what changes can be recommended in connection to the strengthening of social media in a bid to enhance communication at your PR agencies?

1.7.2   Geographical Scope

On the geographical scope, the study was conducted within 2 PR agencies in Nairobi and constituted only few selected participants who were selected through purposive sampling. These participants offered relevant data required to this study. The study focused on how PR agencies are handling social media, the various challenges encountered and how social media use as a PR tool in improving the various communication channels and image of organizations.

1.7.3   Methodological Scope

In regard to methodology, it is salient to note that the study employed a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi structured questions in order to generate data relevant for this research. Purposive sampling was applied to select participants. In addition, document analysis was used to supplement the interview data. This assisted the researcher to strategically get the required data available from the PR practitioners. The targeted sample respondents were the management and staff who handle social media in the 2 PR agencies. The researcher targeted 10 participants who included 2 PR Directors, 3 PR Managers and 5 PR Officers who handle social media directly. A representation from these departments gave an overall picture of the whole organization as they are the ones who deal with the handling of the social media aspect directly. Data was analysed thematically and the findings presented in narrative form, with paraphrases and quotations.

1.8   Justification of the Study

This study is justified as research examining social media use by PR professionals in Kenya. The study therefore addresses a gap in literature in an area that has not been well explored. A key emerging factor is the adjustment by PR practitioners on the use of social media as an authorized PR tool and how they handle various situations that arise in their daily practice.

Several studies focus on the use of digital and social media for a range of purposes by PR professionals (Davidson, 2016). This include activities in support of media relations (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006), crisis communication responses (Coombs&

Holladay, 2015), employee communication, government and investor relations as well as customer and consumer relations (Carr& Hayes, 2015). Little is known about how relationships are formed in the online environment and about the potential for community relations (Briones et al., 2011).In this sense, the researcher felt obliged to conduct this research in order to understand whether PR professionals do have strategies and techniques regarding the use of social media. This also enabled the researcher to provide recommendations that can be employed by PR professionals to overcome common challenges faced in the handling of social media.

With the emergence of social media, organizations have been offered new ways to connect with their publics as it allows the organizations to collect immediate feedback about organizational messages and engage in dialogue (Lovejoy et al., 2012). With this backdrop, there have been debates amongst PR practitioners in the recent years as to whether social media is being adequately utilized by PR practitioners as it should in Kenya. Despite the considerable excitement surrounding the potential of interactive social media, there seems to be inefficient information on the best ways in which PR practitioners are utilizing these media and how they are influencing or changing the PR practice.

Generally, this research focused on social media as a PR tool in the PR practice and how PR scholars are striving to attain both understanding and clarity regarding the use of social media. This research touched on all these areas and brought out the key issues that need to be addressed by PR professionals so as to make social media a more effective PR tool. Solis and Breakenridge (2009) state that, as part of the new media regime,

strategically participating in social media is not only critical in the evolution of Public Relations (PR) but it is also necessary to effectively communicate with the people that can help you extend the conversations that impact your organization. Rodney (2009) maintains that the impact of social media on corporate communications is changing the role of the PR practitioner. In short, the world has changed, and the dynamics of PR have changed with it.

As organizations are increasingly integrating social media into their PR strategies as a way of engaging and interacting with various audiences, there is need for PR practitioners to speed up its transition in order to make organizations realize and appreciate its worth in their success. This research, therefore sought to re-position social media as a key organizational function that contributes to the advancement of PR and communication as a whole.

1.9   Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to have a positive effect in the management of social media by PR agencies which will as a result lead to competency by the staff, management and PR industry at large. In addition, it will assist to know the importance of social media and improve it further. The information can then be used in the formulation of appropriate intervention to address the challenges facing social media in the PR industry.PR agencies in operation in Kenya despite their status, size or location would find the study useful in highlighting the dynamics behind social media and the various client preferences. This will thus assist them in amending their social media strategies as a result gaining competitive advantage.

The study aimed to come up with findings that can be used to sensitize PR practitioners on the magnitude of social media hence triggering the structure of various aspects concerning social media management to the industry. Furthermore, the study will assist to identify social media gaps and enable PR practitioners to have a different mindset and perception towards social media. The results from the study will enable them to understand and approach social media management from a strategic perspective by offering vital information hence contribute to the body of knowledge in PR and the field of communication studies as a whole.

1.10   Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a preamble, background information and introductory study therefore setting the pace for the study besides serving as a basis for subsequent chapters. The themes discussed in the chapter are the definitions of the key terms, background information and in addition the problem statement, the aim and objectives of the study, research questions, scope, justification and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 1ntroduction

This chapter deals with the literature related to the area of study. It includes the theoretical framework, an overview of literature and models that are related to the research problem presented in the previous chapter. The researcher in addition addresses the key concepts, situates the study to the field of communication studies and further analyses the observations and opinions related to this study as presented by various scholars.

2.1.1 Public Relations as Communication

The Public Relations practice has totally been redefined by social media. As the future of PR continues to transform, research on social media use in PR has extremely grown over the years. Public Relations scholars have struggled to articulate the competencies, capabilities or skills required in the PR practice (Figee et al, 2017). They further add that, most of the literature available focuses on the definition of the PR role and practice to the exclusion of a general body of knowledge of the field. After over 75 years of PR existence, Rex Harlow attempted to summarise the definition of the term based on nearly 500 definitions (Cernicova 2016). Despite such notable efforts, a universally acceptable definition of PR remains elusive. As Gregory (2008) pointed out, the resulting confusion around terminology and role definition has produced a disjointed body of literature in which terms such as roles, competency and capabilities are used interchangeably.

There are many definitions of Public Relations (PR). The main reason for this is that the industry itself is always changing and adapting to the world and growing power of the media both old and new (Bryer & Zavatton, 2011). To better understand public relations as a discipline in communication, the researcher explored its various definitions before delving into how PR practitioners use social media as a communication channel. Among the many competing definitions of PR, this research was informed by Grunig and Hunts (1984) definition who state that PR is the management of communication between an organisation and its publics'.

In 1982, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA, 2012) adopted the PR definition that Public Relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics they further add that public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other, a similar definition from Grunig and Hunts (1984) description of PR as the management of communications between an organization and its publics. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations, UK (CIPR, 2012) offers another definition of public relations as a reputation which occurs as the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. The CIPR further explains that PR is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.

Brown (2009), states that scores of people view PR as 'spin' or 'propaganda' it is in this regard that many consider the industry as unethical. He further adds that, this in turn, reflects to the major misunderstandings of the profession and lack of respect for it which

to some extent depend on the fact that there is still no equally recognized PR definition by all PR bodies. Davis (2008) seems to be in agreement with Brown (2009) as he notes that 'spin' is a synonym of deceit, trickery or at best exaggeration, wishful thinking or fanciful interpretation. Solis and Breakenridge (2009) add their voice by observing how often PR professionals and other influencers such as journalists are unhappy with the inauthentic, disingenuous and spam like ways of pitching them. Nevertheless, Smith (2013) argues that the industry is becoming more professional and is being considered as "the guardian of both brand and corporate reputation.

From the above, it is apparent that PR communication involves a myriad of issues. Public relations academicians are yet to choose a universal, holistic definition of public relations (Martin 2009). Moss & deSanto (2012) list eight key challenges faced by Public Relations practitioners. This include, the ongoing challenge of defining PR, organizational and social ignorance of the value of PR efforts to organizations, the lack of a formally recognized managerial-level function for PR within the organization, the overlap and/or encroachment of other managerial functions on PR, the size of the PR function/presence in most organizations, the breadth and variety of PR practitioner roles, the varied background of PR practitioner and finally the lack of general managerial/business education for PR technicians and managers.

Viewed collectively as well as individually, these eight challenges assist in explaining to a large degree some of the challenges faced by PR professionals and why the practice has yet to be fully embraced as a mainstream 'management' function within organizations. The PR industry has therefore been thrown into a spin following the onset of social media

and the need for better strategies and innovativeness is inevitable for most agencies to keep afloat.

In conclusion, studies reveal that public relations continues to be an emerging field of study with no consensus definition of its boundaries, changing nature, or theoretical underpinnings embraced by both scholars and practitioners (Curtin, 2011; Edwards, 2012; Greenwood, 2010; L'Etang, 2013). Thus, public relations research is informed by rather different sets of assumptions, values, and worldviews that have been subject to debate (Davidson, 2016; Fitch & L'Etang, 2016; Russell & Lamme, 2016).

2.1.2 Public Relations and Social Media

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others have become important communication tools for PR practitioners not just in Kenya but globally. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) lists social media as a discipline within PR besides advertising, multimedia communications, crisis communications, executive communications, internal communications, events and marketing communications (PRSA 2020).

Just like Public Relations, there remains to be a lack of a proper, specific, and mutually-agreed upon definition of social media across disciplines. Several definitions however exist. Social media is defined as interactive computer-mediated technologies with the potential of facilitating sharing and creation of information, career, and ideas and related expressions through the virtual networks and communities (Synder, 2019).

Social media platforms are diverse and they include blogs, virtual worlds and social networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The social media of concern include social networking platforms, online videos, blogs, and podcasts. According to Gillin (2009) social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. With over 83 percent penetration of the internet in Kenya, the PR practitioners have to tap into the opportunities offered by social media to improve their performance. The growing popularity of social media platforms in Kenya has seen over 70 percent of PR agencies and corporations investing in it (Musau, 2017).

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC. Scholars Effing et al (2011), Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) are all in agreement that social media is about online interactions and connections. Grunig (2009) acknowledges that academic research concerning social media potential has undergone major developments during the previous decade which is mainly attributable to speedy growth in Internet usage. Musau (2017) adds his voice by saying that social media usage has drastically increased in the recent past, ranging from personal benefits to business and marketing of products. He adds that, PR practitioners have as a result resorted to innovative strategies so as to ensure that they reach their audiences through the social media invention.

According to Brown (2009) people are engaging in the social web with others like them by not only consuming content, but also sharing ideas, interests and recommendations. Even more precise, Lewis (2010) noted that social media simply serve as a label for

digital technologies that allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content. Scott (2011) describes social media as the way everyone can participate by sharing ideas, thoughts and context and so can build relationships online, which is why he compares the term to a 'cocktail party'. The social media definition continues to advance considering its dynamic nature. From the definitions indicated above, it is evident that various social media definitions exist and scholars are yet to come up with one standard definition considering its ever changing nature. Weber (2009) stresses that, the world is shifting dramatically into the digital direction and those with a clear understanding of this change will exchange information in an effective manner compared to those without.

From the definitions illustrated, combining social media and PR is therefore inevitable as the two are interconnected. It is a collision that boosts an organizations or individuals profile, reputation and credibility. Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) stated that significant gaps remain in knowledge of how organizations are using social media and how these important new channels of communication can and should be utilized in the context of public relations and corporate communication (p. 289), suggesting there is still much we are to yet understand about the effects of social media on the profession. Martin (2009) argued that social media has led to the emergence of a new technique embodied by conservation and society. The term is normally associated with any site on the internet. Margetts et al. (2015: 5) further specify Martin's (2009) definition that points out social media as Internet-based platform that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content, usually using either mobile or web-based technologies. Margetts et al. (2015) further stress that by social media technologies, we mean those digital platforms, services

and applications built around the convergence of content sharing, public communication, and interpersonal connection.

Other recent definitions include Russell & Lamme (2016) who refer to social media as internet-based applications and websites that promote the sharing of user-generated content, communication and participation on a large scale. Yanacopulos (2016) in addition states that social media refers to online media such as texts, photos, messages, videos, blogs and other platforms. The point of social media is that it is interactive, enables people to share information and helps foster conversations (p. 134). Socha& Eber-Schmid (2016) give a different perspective and define social media as new media. They go ahead to define new media as a 21st Century catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound.

McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase (2017) also review the academic discussions and define social media as web-based services that allow individuals, communities and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact and build communities by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share and engage with user-generated content that is easily accessible. Burgess and Poell (2017) provide a recent definition that moreless opines with the other scholars that social media is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people and peers.

2.1.2.1 Social Media Platforms used by PR Practitioners

This study further explored the various platforms that PR practitioners employ when using social media. Facebook emerged as the mostly used social media channel given its reach and uptake. Facebook cuts across all demographics and is used by many to communicate with their family and friends besides acts as a major news source. PR practitioners use Facebook as part of their digital campaigns, for outreach, advertising and building communities. A screenshot of a Facebook page posted by a PR practitioner handling the account is illustrated below:
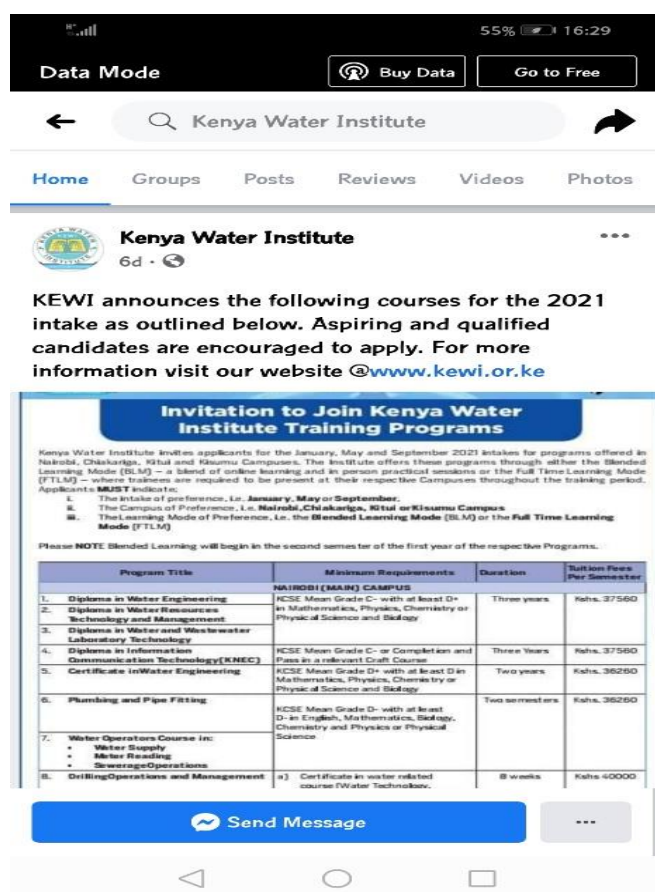
Figure 2.1: Screenshot Sample of a Facebook Page

Another commonly used social media platform by PR practitioners is WhatsApp. The WhatsApp website (2017) indicates that WhatsApp started as an alternative to SMS and currently supports sending and receiving a variety of media such as text, photos, videos, documents and location as well as voice calls. In Kenya, PR professionals use WhatsApp to obtain details of events and news alerts, exchange media lists, job opportunities and journalist movements. A majority of Kenyans prefer WhatsApp groups as a form of communication as it enables one to have instant knowledge of what is happening around the country. A screenshot of a WhatsApp message of the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) comprising of several women PR practitioners in Kenya is illustrated below:
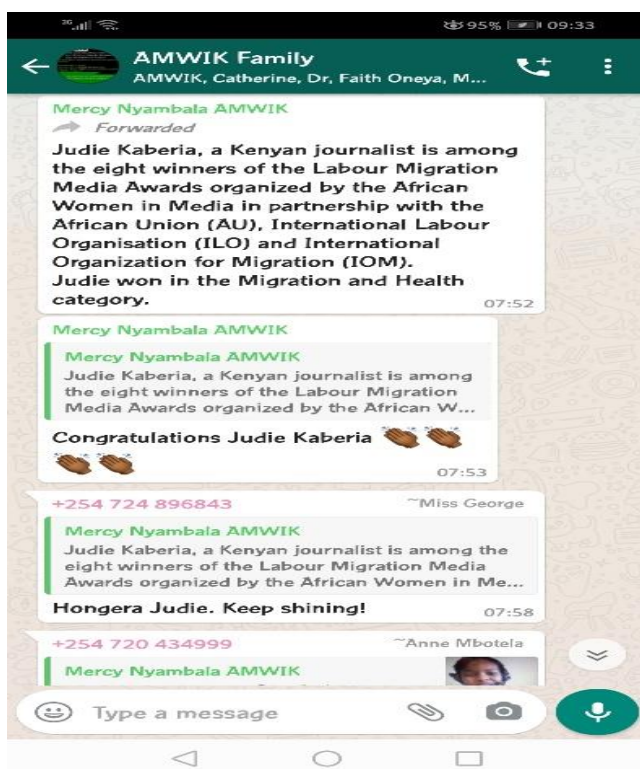
Figure 2.2: Screenshot sample of a WhatsApp Chat

Twitter is asocial media platform used by PR practitioners in Kenya. It only deals with 'tweets' and is helpful when PR agencies are required to communicate their message on a regular basis and in a summarised format. Twitter has emerged to be a powerful social media platform especially when it comes to articulating issues and pushing for agendas with the usage of the hashtag (#).PR practitioners widely use Twitter to share live updates and buy Twitter Ads which has become popular when handling big accounts for their digital campaigns. The wide use by Kenyans under Twitter subscription, has led to the emergence of the popular term 'KOT' (Kenyans on Twitter) who have been recognized globally. A screenshot sample of a twitter page of one of the leading global PR agencies is illustrated below:

Figure 2.3: Screenshot of a Twitter Page

LinkedIn is a professional network that allows individuals to be introduced to and collaborate with other professionals. Many professions including PR practitioners have found jobs through this platform as organizations use it to look for suitable employees hence making it a suitable social media platform for business engagements and serious work-related matters. PR firms use LinkedIn to scout for more experienced and qualified PR professionals and in addition buy LinkedIn Ads for their campaigns. A screenshot sample of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) LinkedIn page is illustrated below:
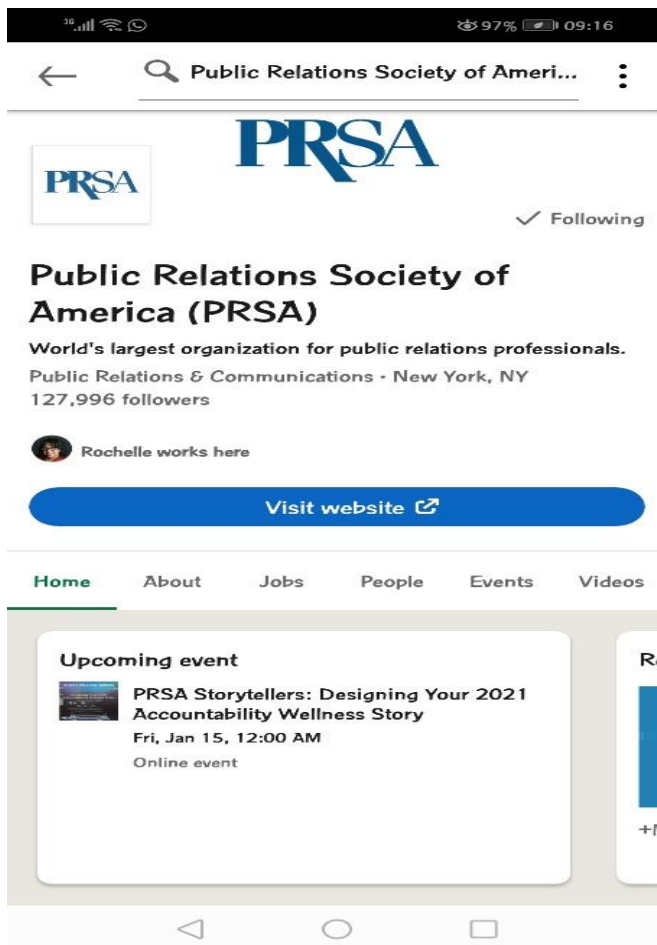
Figure 2.4: Screenshot of a LinkedIn Page

Instagram is another social media platform that is used by PR practitioners in Kenya. Instagram which is more like an online photo album is popular among the youth in Kenya who use it to post edited (filtered) images of themselves. Its clear visuals make it excellent for creating awareness and showcasing worthy causes for organizations. In addition, Instagram is suitable for promoting events during, before and after as a way of keeping all audiences engaged all through. A screenshot of an Instagram page of UNICEF Kenya which is operated by a PR practitioner is illustrated below:

Figure 2.5: Screenshot of an Instagram Handle

YouTube has grown to become a game changer for PR practitioners in building brands. PR practitioners capitalize on the free video postings and broad appeal that add a dynamic element to a message assisting activities such as a press release. YouTube is easily accessible as long as one has an internet connection and essentially free to use as most videos can be created with little to no cost. PR practitioners use YouTube video channels to broaden the reach of their messages and also to promote their campaigns in a more engaging and interactive way considering they can be accessed by anyone through views. A screenshot sample of a YouTube page as posted by a PR practitioner is illustrated below:
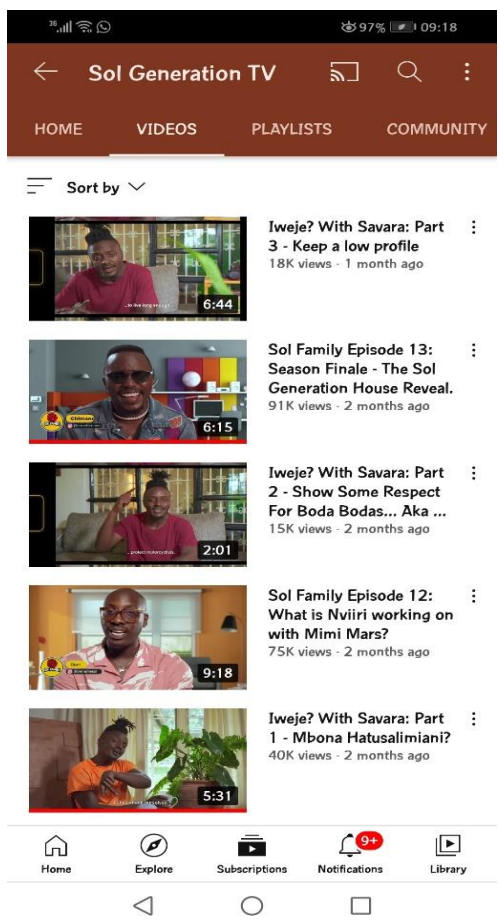
Figure 2.6: Screenshot of a YouTube Channel

Besides Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram, PR practitioners use blogs as they are a considerably friendly and accessible way to communicate to the public. The use of blogs has become inevitable as PR campaigns aren't complete without a blog strategy which gives messages a more personalized and fine-tuned voice. According to a report released by the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), the number of Kenyans active on social media platforms increased in 2017.

2.2 Situating the Study in the Field of Communication Studies

The communication field is diverse with many contexts and disciplines. The following seven contexts are however most common: intrapersonal, interpersonal, inter group, intercultural, public, mass, and organizational. Public Relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends (Broom& Smith, 2009). Broom (2009) further notes the public relations practitioner as a communication facilitator, a sensitive listener and a broker of information. Communication facilitators act as interpreters, mediators and liaisons between an enterprise and the public. They preserve a two-way communication and allow for the exchange of information by eliminating hindrances in relationships and keeping channels open for communication.

Eyrich et al., (2008) state that public relations practitioners are implementing the social media tools in the public relations communication as it is making their job easier. They further add that with social media the chance to reach a broader audience has been made possible as well as engaging in conversation with the public's of the organization (Eyrich et al., 2008). Bernoff & Li (2008) reiterates with this view and indicates that majority of

the communication needs that exist are met through digital communication platforms and knowing how to use them for the good of the organization becomes paramount.

A UNDP report in 2018 states that, digital media platforms and by extension the internet have presented the leading edge of revolving communication. The PR practitioners understand the impact of social media on their work because it has been the tool used to promote social, political and economic development (UNDP, 2018). There seems to be no clear approach on the approach and implementation of social media as a main communication tool by agencies to reach out to the public in spite of the fact that its benefits provide a more long-term interaction between the agencies and their clients.

Bernays (2013) underscored the importance of PR as a tool in adjustment, integration and interpretation between society and individuals or groups. He further indicated that public support and understanding is fundamental to survival in the current competitive system. A study carried out by Martin (2009), established that social media has become an important source of news.PR professionals are convinced that social media sites and network blogs affect the content of the mainstream media as indicated by (Wright & Hinson, 2008, 2009). This development suggests that with the current media climate, PRO's need to be considering social media as part of their communication strategy (Robson and Sutherland 2012). This informs the study by bringing out the roles of PR practitioners in the social media context by demonstrating how the practice is handled by their respective agencies.

Adoyo (2014) however, acknowledges that the PR arena in Kenya today is still a work in progress. He further adds that although PR is now more or less a standard corporate practice given fully fledged status, it is still primarily based on the premise of a positive visual appeal in the public's eye and getting rave reviews in the media. Studies on social media communication amongst PR professionals in PR agencies in Kenya are extremely limited and still need to be advanced. Scott (2011) explains that PR used to be almost only about media relations, if a professional had a good story, all they needed to do was to pitch it to a reporter. If they liked it, they would write about it enlightening people on what was happening with organizations. Today, companies can directly and in real time communicate with buyers and other influencers on multiple social media platforms he further adds. Reaching target audiences has become much easier given the web 2.0 background which has provided PR practitioners with alternative means to personalise their messages. Furthermore, media houses do not necessarily have to wait to receive press releases as they can be easily found on the social web. However, a major concern for PR agencies is that there appears to be lack of control or order on online conversations. The demand for 24, hour stories and content in the media is a major challenge for the industry (Butterick, 2011).

To this end, scholars agree that many studies have focused on the broad use of social media in the field of communication as a whole. However, studies that amplify the specific highlights and experiences of the social media aspect by PR practitioners are countable. For PR academics, social media is evolving so fast. Its daily, very vibrant and diverse expansion has resulted to an exponential growth putting a strain to PR agencies. As the future of PR continues to transform, research on social media use in PR has grown

tremendously over the past couple of years. Public Relations scholars have struggled to articulate the competencies, capabilities or skills required in the PR practice (Figee et al, 2017). They further add that, most of the literature available focuses on the definition of the PR role and practice to the exclusion of a general body of knowledge of the field.

This study therefore aimed at establishing how PR practitioners are employing social media as a communication tool as it has become evident that the available social media platforms have positively affected communication between organisations management and employees as well as the relationship between corporations and customers. Scheduled events are posted on Facebook and Twitter pages and thus the organization target audiences are aware of all affairs in which the company would anticipate to be involved in, he adds.

In relation to theory, Grunig (2009) applies the four PR models to social media. He states that social media if utilised to its full potential could offer public relations with a more interactive, strategic, global and socially responsible two-way approach in communication. Moreover, Grunig highlights the significance of the various publics. He contends that the relations that PR practitioners who in most cases handle PR for organizations build with the immediate public matter the most. He further adds that PR practitioners are not in need of relationships with the rest of the public but with targeted individuals and groups of individuals that they have direct links with such as their shareholders and direct consumers.

Consequently, it is apparent that the communication of social media in PR involves a number of issues hence it is for this purpose that this study examines how PR

practitioners can best utilize social media as a communication tool. Arguably, Phillips and Young (2009) contend that majority of content is in the open for all the public. It is difficult to conceal information from the public once it is shared on social media considering that each individual within the public domain has a separate network that PR agencies might not communicate or share in. Thus, a user with access to exclusive information from a PR agency could still use the share function and disseminate the information to unintended audiences.

2.3   Review of Previous Research

This section presented previous research in relation to social media in the PR practice with the aim of revealing the lacuna that exists in previous research. Even though studies have been conducted on the social media phenomenon in the PR profession, not many have sought to further understand it intensely as a strategic tool, more so in PR agencies in Nairobi, Kenya. Previous studies have established the various factors that encompass social media in the PR practice and the excitement surrounding it.

In their study, Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) and Gillin (2008) illustrated how less than 30% of practitioners had a strategic approach to their social media use. Instead most organisations seem to apply a 'build it and they will come' attitude to their social media and just put whatever information they have elsewhere into their social media presence and claim they are embracing social media. Macnamara et. al.,(2018) further carried out a survey of communication professionals in 22 Asia-Pacific countries on their skills, knowledge and abilities. Wright and Hinson (2017) in addition carried out a similar survey that saw over 90% of the respondents use social media as an important

communication tool with key publics. However, rather than fully utilizing the interactive capacity of these channels for two-way communication, practitioners continue to mostly use social media for one-way information transmission (Macnamara et al., 2018). Digital measurement efforts face a similar dilemma in Asia-Pacific as the communication professionals reported a lack of digital analytics skills, using algorithms and understanding big data (Macnamara et al., 2018).

Other scholars have separated different types of social media use in public relations such as website communication (Ingehoff & Koelling, 2009), Facebook activities (Waters et al, 2009) and the use of Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Wright and Hinson did a longitudinal study on the emerging media use in public relations between 2006 and 2013. Findings of the study suggest that public relations practitioners are using more and more social media in their activities. They assert that the new tools are providing unique opportunities for both PR professionals and a wide variety of strategic publics (Wright and Hinson, 2013). Various other scholars such as (Hearn et. al 2008; Henderson &Bowley, 2010; Macnamara et.al, 2013; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Waters et al., 2009) are all in agreement that the social media sphere requires organisations to be transparent, authentic, give up control, engage, collaborate, and be personal, relevant and speedy with their communication

With the onset of the new millennium, Hill & White (2000) researched how the internet in general was transforming the lives of PR practitioners. They further established how the internet tends to strengthen stakeholder's power and enhance organizations ability to collect information, monitor public opinion, increase corporate identity and engage in

dialogues with their key publics. Although much research was being done in the area, technology was already changing as quickly and studies published then indicated this. Kelleher (2007) proposes that while the social media environment can be daunting for public relations practitioners, if their publics are using social media platforms, practitioners should be meeting them there. However, some have argued that social media means practitioners must "develop a new form of cultural literacy" (Galloway, 2005) as the old principles of media relations do not work effectively in this new world where everything is instantaneous, mobile, and searchable (Galloway, 2005; Macnamara, 2008).

(Wilson and Supa (2013) studied the effect of Twitter on the public relations-journalist relationship. The scholars used a questionnaire which covered a sample of 340 journalists and 291 public relations practitioners. Of those that completed the survey 48 (14%) were journalists and 66 (22.6%) public relations practitioners. Findings of the study suggest that the benefits of Twitter as an information-sharing platform were clearly recognized as important for both journalism and public relations.

In another study, Jo and Jung (2005) examined key elements of the website homepages of top companies in the USA and South Korea and found that there was little that could have categorized as examples of symmetrical two-way communications with the majority of South Korean elements being those of press agentry and the majority of US website elements being public information. The findings supported what other studies in the area have shown in that 'public relations practitioners are not yet fully using the internet to increase interaction between organizations and their publics' (Jo & Jung 2005). Gillin (2008) also assesses the new social media usage as well as how this influence different

perspectives of the organization. The study analyzes the usage of social media initiatives within the organization and looks to determine exactly how these influences how the organization functions. Additionally, researchers have been projecting ahead, trying to establish what will be social media's life cycle in the long run.

Along these lines, a study carried out of 120 corporate websites from six European countries, the US and Singapore by Alfonso & Miguel (2006) found that the use of Internet tools to build strong and solid relationships with the media is far from ideal. The significant weaknesses detected highlighted that these companies may neither have comprehensive, well-designed public relations strategies nor sufficient resources to execute them and further, that any shortcomings in an organization's public relations practices were more evident due to the power of the internet (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006).

Another key research thread deals with issues of privacy and intimacy generated by social networks. For example, Schultz et.al (2011) examined the effects of social media strategies on the recipients' secondary crisis communications e.g. sharing information and leaving a message and reactions (e.g., willingness to boycott) and they found that the medium matters more than the message. Although the literature indicates that practitioners are demonstrating awareness and knowledge of social media and its principles, organisations generally fail to make efficient and effective use of the potential for two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue (Robson & Sutherland, 2012).

A research conducted by Gabriel and Koh (2016): Social media use by public relations practitioners in Malaysia contradicts Fitch's (2009) research that PR practitioners in Malaysia and Singapore were hesitant to use new media because of a loss of interpersonal or human connection. In the study, a total of 26 PR practitioners of which 18 were PR consultants responded to an online survey. It was shockingly discovered that a large number of PR practitioners (84.6%) had already adapted to social media and were actively using it to communicate directly with their various constituents about their organizations on information such as mission statements, objectives and goals, the latest business news, updates and announcements. These desired results included an increase in sales besides branding, awareness and popularity of the organization. However, while respondents felt that social media puts the word out faster in addition to the fact that a majority of people are connected to it, some practitioners cautioned that social media cannot be a standalone tool in PR (Fitch's, 2009).

The Pew Research Center (2018) noted that citizens from developing nations use social media to access news as much as their counterparts in developed nations. Furthermore, they state that Africa's emerging economies such as Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Nigeria and Tunisia ranked Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as the top news sites. As much as the previous research on the use of social media by PR professionals in Kenya is countable, available literature implies that social media usage by PR practitioners is in operation globally and Kenya is not an isolated case. Many studies have demonstrated that social media platforms are essential in the operations of PR agencies (Arika & Moronge, 2017). Oneya (2010) study on the impact of social media on Public Relations in Kenya established that social media is used with challenges such as lack of internet

accessibility, skills and reliability. This informs the researcher that as much as social media is being used by PR professionals, its role and impact is yet to be fully tapped and that social media is there to compliment the traditional forms of traditional media but not to phase them out.

In another study, Mbogo (2011) sought to research on training needs assessment for PR officers in Public firms in Nairobi. She used the survey design. Her findings indicated that public relations professionals in most organizations lack training in many areas of their profession such as events management, budget, public speaking, pitching, strategic thinking, presentation skills and team building. In a different study, Omondi (2012) analysed the performance of PR practice in government ministries in Kenya and found out that the PR practice has a high impact in government according to 46% of respondents. Some scholars have challenged the effectiveness of social media in PR practices. Distaso and McCorkindale (2014) and Inya (2017) confirmed that in this age, it is important for the PR agencies to understand how their consultants share and gather information to influence their audiences.

As indicated in the literature review, many scholars who have researched on the social media experience in PR agree that its use has entirely altered the PR practice through enablingbetter reach to target audiences besides offering a relatively direct and current form of communication that promotes relationships. From the literature review, it is notable that the impact of social media on the PR practice has drawn significant scholarly interest globally leading to a number of publications on the subject. However, the majority of academic studies pursued in relation to social media and PR are quantitative

in nature and have been undertaken in other industries and specializations. An overwhelming amount of studies in regard to PR focuses on numbers and statistics while a few have attempted to focus on the voices of PR practitioners who encounter social media. Countable qualitative studies have been carried out specifically targeting the use of social media by PR practitioners.

Overall, social media use by PR practitioners remains significantly unaddressed. The researcher concludes that, most of the literature available regarding social media in public relations was available in the Western context with very few scholars in Africa and by extension Kenya where the study was conducted. Very little research exists regarding social media communication among PR practitioners as most research seems to concentrate on the sensationalism surrounding social media creating a gap that this research attempted to fill.

2.4   Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework was informed by Grunig and Hunts theory of Public Relations (1984) which describes four classic public relations models. Kombo and Trump (2006) point out that a theoretical framework plays a major role in research as it enables the researcher to understand the total realm of the research problem from a wider perspective rather than from a personalized self-approach. It seeks to make clear why things are the way they are using theories.

Of importance to not is that, Grunig and Hunt are among the key scholars when it comes to PR theory. Their work has been widely interpreted as offering the foundational basis to the PR practice even though their model is almost twenty years old. This study will

therefore address the Grunig and Hunts theory of PR as it forms a basis of most other theories that have developed throughout the years regarding PR. This study explored the intellectual aspects of Grunig and Hunts theory and in addition, its applicability to the study was also examined. The researcher discussed Grunig and Hunts theory hereunder:

2.4.1   Grunig and Hunts Model of Public Relations

Discussions and research in PR has focused mostly on James Grunig and Todd Hunt's - Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models which assist in understanding the diversity in functions and practices of the PR practice. The model consists of four elements which include: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Notably, other theories and models applicable to PR have been designed from these. Most recently, Schultz & Goritz (2016) opine that since they were first introduced, these four models of public relations have helped construct advances in the field of public relations.

Grunig's four models of PR reveal the transition of the PR practice whereby most organisations have moved from and become more open and receptive to communication strategies based on one - way communication to become two - way communication. They chose to use the term "models" to explain the four types of public relations as it emphasizes that they are concepts (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). They further add that the four models of public relations are intended as a means to help understand how public relations are practiced.

The first model which is the press agent or publicity model define that PR serves as propaganda. This is a one-way form of communication that uses persuasion to shape the

thoughts and opinions of key audiences. In this model, audience feedback and accuracy are of no importance. PR practitioners use this model to create propagandist techniques and an audience analysis research is not undertaken. On the other hand, the public information model presents more accurate information as it detaches from the manipulative tactics used in the press agent model.PR practitioners may conduct an audience analysis research to guide their strategies and tactics. However, the communication pattern is still one-way. Notably, a number of organizations are still entrenched in the one-way communication which comprises ofold media channels such as print, radio and television.

The third model which is also referred to as the two-way asymmetrical model specifies that PR practitioners have a similar function to that of the press agent/publicist. However, the practitioners here use knowledge gained from social science theory and the study of attitudes and behavior in order to convince publics to acknowledge the organization's outlook and to act in a way that backs the organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).Persuasive communication is used in this model to benefit the organization more than its audiences therefore, it is considered asymmetrical or imbalanced. Finally, the fourth model also referred as the two-way symmetrical model is described as the most ethical model that PR professionals should aspire to use in their everyday tactics and strategies (Hopkins, 2014).According to this model, PR practitioners should intend to serve as a liaison between the organization and key publics and should in addition ensure that all involved parties benefit. PR practitioners should strive to always implement the two-way symmetrical model in their campaigns as it is considered the perfect way to communicate to audiences.

2.4.2   Application of Grunig and Hunts Model to the Study

The Grunig and Hunts model of PR was deemed appropriate to this study since it sought

to establish how these models can be used to build constructive relationships between PR

practitioners and their publics. Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed this model to describe

the field's various management and organizational practices and state that depending on

which definition of public relations one chooses to use, different models apply. Grunig

(2011) recently applied Grunig and Hunt (1984) four models of public relations to social

media. He states that social media used to its full potential can provide public relations

with a more two-way and interactive, global, strategic and socially responsible approach.

Whereas, definitions that underline mutual understanding meet the two-way symmetric

model. This model therefore serves as a guideline to create programs, strategies and

tactics by PR practitioners in their daily practice. Grunig (2011) argues in favor of the

two-way communication and highlights the significance social media can have on this

dialogic communication. Both public relations and social media are about exchanging

information (Phillips & Young, 2009) which supports arguments from public relations

practitioners proclaiming positive outcomes through the use of social media. Grunig and

Hunt (1984) are considered the first to define typical ways in which public relations is

practiced through the four models of public relations which are based on their

understanding of organizational and management practice. This approach is demonstrated

in their definition of PR which states that PR activities are part of the management of

communication between an organisation and its publics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The press agentry sole purpose is to gain publicity for the organization when PR practitioners are determined to have stories of their clients appear in the media. The press agentry model applies when a communication campaign strives for favorable publicity especially in the mass media. This model can therefore be applied to social media as PR practitioners are determined to have their messages out in the public.

The purpose of the public information model is to disseminate positive information about an organization to the media and public. PR campaigns based on the public information model use journalists to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures and direct mail (Grunig 2011). The researcher noted that the Press agentry and public information are one-way of public relations whose communication programs are not based on research and strategic planning.

Contrary to excellent PR programs which emphasize on sophisticated and effective models of communication, press agentry and public communication are asymmetrical models that try to make the organization look good either through propaganda or disseminating only favorable information (Grunig, 2009). Some PR practitioners have used this approach while handling social media in that they use propaganda or fake news as is sometimes referred to, to test the waters before they roll out a social media campaign.

In the third model of Grunig and Hunts, the two-way asymmetrical model, PR practitioners conduct research to identify messages that are likely to persuade the public. Public relations officers practicing this model have the interests of their organization or

client at heart and do not put into consideration the views of the public. Grunig (2011) acknowledges how the two-way asymmetrical model is a more sophisticated approach in that it uses research to develop messages that are most likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organization wants.

The fourth model, the two-way symmetrical model, is geared towards building a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the public. According to (Grunig, 2009), the two-way symmetrical is considered the excellence model in public relations. It describes a model of public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics.

It is claimed that social media has revolutionized both PR theory and practice. Following further research Grunig et al (2009) began to conceive of a model for 'excellent' public relations based on his two-way symmetrical model. Specifically, Grunig and White (2002) argued that for PR to be excellent, it must be symmetrical, idealistic and critical besides managerial. Grunig wanted to abandon persuasive or asymmetrical communication and develop a model of excellent PR which required PR practitioners to adopt a new theoretical perspective that saw PR as idealistic, optimistic and exemplary (Grunig & White in Grunig et al, 2011).

In conclusion, the researcher noted that the two-way symmetrical model formulated by (Grunig, 2009) as the excellence model in public relations is the most favored by Kenyan practitioners from among the four models discussed. The objective of the two-way symmetrical approach in public relations is to create a mutually beneficial relationship

between the organization and its publics (Grunig, 2009) which is the core objective while handling social media by PR professionals.

2.5   Rationale of Study Based on Literature Review

This study brought a clear description of social media communication amongst PR practitioners that will serve as a practical relevance to the social concerns and technological application. Grunig (2009) applies the four PR models. He states that social media if utilised to its full potential could offer PR with a more interactive, strategic, global and socially responsible two-way approach in communication. Moreover, Grunig highlights the significance of the various publics. He contends that the relations that PR practitioners who in most cases handle PR for organizations build with the immediate public matter the most. He further adds that PR practitioners are not in need of relationships with the rest of the public but with targeted individuals and groups of individuals that they have direct links with such as their shareholders and direct consumers.

2.6   Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, the study reviewed literature relating to the concept and practices of social media into the PR practice. It also highlighted the theoretical framework by illustrating Grunig and Hunts Public Relations model and its relevance ad application to this study. Finally, the study reviewed the rationale of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This Chapter lays out details of the research methods that are utilized in conducting the study such as research design, population and sampling, data collection tools and procedures, validity and reliability of the data collection instruments and data analysis and interpretation.

3.2   Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate how PR practitioners use social media in their daily practice. The researcher preferred the qualitative strategy mainly over the quantitative method because the former is quite flexible in terms of the variety of data types applicable and in addition the types of data collected are much more diverse as opposed to the latter research method which is skewed towards collected quantitative data in terms of numbers. Creswell (2013) opines that, the qualitative approach demonstrates a different approach to scholarly inquiry than methods of quantitative research. Although the processes are similar, qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs.

According to Martin (2009), qualitative research is committed to viewing the social world: social action and events from the view point of the people being studied; that is discovering their socially constructed reality and penetrating the frames of meaning within which they conduct their activities. Braun & Clarke (2006) also provided their opinions that qualitative research is a systematic and subjective approach to highlight and explain daily life experiences and to further give them proper meaning.

Generally, the researcher chose the qualitative approach because, as revealed in the literature review section above, most studies investigating social media communication relied heavily on the quantitative approach, mainly through the use of structured survey questionnaires in which results are necessarily determined by the content of questions asked. The researcher thereby utilized the qualitative approach to establish the social and personal experiences of social media use amongst PR practitioners in Kenya.

3.3   The Case Study Method

The Case study method was employed in this research because it is exhaustive in nature and in addition, its ability to provide a real and enlightened record of personal experiences and opinions of subjects being interviewed. Case study research is associated with the investigation of a particular place, community, setting or organization (Bell and Emory, 2011). Patton (2002) underscores the fact that a Case Study seeks to describe a unit in detail, in context and holistically. Gummesson (2012) share the same opinion that a case study research is associated with the investigation of a particular place, community, setting or organization.

Creswell (2009) defines case study as when a researcher explores in-depth, a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The structure of a case study should be the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned (Creswell, 2014). Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) refer to case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon or object within its real life context.

The researcher used data collection tools such as interviews and content analysis which are some of the tools recommended in the case study approach. The Case study method also provided the researcher with an opportunity to probe deeper into how PR professionals use social media strengthening the research findings and conclusions. Yin (2003) in discussing the case study approach, states that the case study allows an investigator to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change and so on.

3.4   Population and Sampling

According to Kombo & Tromp (2006), population is a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken from for measurement. Furthermore, a population refers to an entire group of individuals, events or objects having a common observable characteristic. In other words, population is the aggregate of all that conforms to a given specification (Mugenda and Mugenda. 2003).

The population of this study was public relations professionals since they are dominant players in the handling of the social media aspect. The study was conducted in two PR Agencies based in Nairobi, Kenya. The target population was PR agency directors, managers and officers who handle their clients' social media accounts. The criterion for their selection was based on their role as the exact custodians and key informants to the study.

The study adapted purposive sampling to establish the two PR agencies where the study was conducted. Purposive sampling has the benefit of ensuring the selection of

information-rich participants (Patton 2002) that are relevant in addressing the research objectives (Bryman 2012) and therefore most likely to ensure insightful contributions to research findings. According to Berg (2012) purposive sampling is characterized by the use of judgment and deliberate effort to obtain a representative sample while reducing error and increasing possibilities in analysis. The research location is essential because it brings out certain elements of insight that inform the study (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). The 2 PR agencies are well established with one being a multinational with their headquarters based in New York.

Important to note is that the selected PR agencies comprise of different departments, however, the study is mainly focused on the public relations units that handle social media directly. The researcher arrived at 10 participants who comprised of 2 PR Directors, 3 PR Managers and 5 PR Officers through purposive sampling. These participants were specifically picked to participate in the study based on their experience and knowledge concerning the use of social media. The researcher ensured adequate time would be allocated to each of the participants to share their experiences and for the researcher to be able to do the analysis. All the interviews were conducted in the English language because the participants are well versed with it.

3.5   Data Generation Techniques

This study employed two qualitative data generation techniques. They are interviews and document analysis which are further explained hereunder:

3.5.1   In-Depth Interviews

The selection of interviewees was based on purposive sampling which requires the choice of sample to be based on certain criteria. The criterion in this study was that the participants were required to be PR professionals so that their rich experience could be used to expand and explain the study. Gibbs et al (2007) defines interview as a technique of generating data which involves gathering data through direct verbal interaction between individuals.

According to O'Leary (2014) a good interviewer needs the following skills: technical and interactive proficiency, attention and steering besides competencies in communication theory and knowing how to deal with previous knowledge and personal bias. The researcher opted for individual rather than group interviews considering the significant amount of freedom associated with responses obtained through one on one interviews as discussed by (Dury, 2008).

Saunders et al., (2012) discussed three types of interviews. These include semi-structured, structured and unstructured interviews. Whereas unstructured interviews allow interviewees the liberty of responding freely as in a conversation, structured interviews contain a set of stringently designed questions/prompts in an inflexible order that an interviewer guides an interviewee into responding without allowing for further probing or clarification by the interviewer (Bryman 2012). Structured interviews are described as closed-ended whereas semi-structured interviews are open-ended (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). The study employed semi-structured interviews as they would enable the researcher to generate necessary information to answer the research questions stated in

this research. Semi structured interviews allow for flexibility and convenience (O'Leary, 2014) and in addition allow the researcher to deeply explore the participant by probing and examining the emerging issues to the subject under investigation that may be prior perceived as not being pertinent (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). Semi structured interviews therefore enabled the researcher to gather rich data that was human in nature.

Another justification for the use of the in-depth interviews was that they allowed the researcher to understand the participant's world. Interviews with the PR professionals lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. The reason behind this was that the study was more concerned with understanding the use of social media and how it has impacted the PR industry. The researcher sought prior permission for the use of the audio recorders, which was granted by all the participants. They audio-recorded all the interviews using a digital recorder, and took personal notes at the same time. Prior to the interviews, the researcher ensured that the participants understood the purpose and objectives of the study.

3.5.2   Document Analysis

This study also employed document analysis to supplement interviews as a data generation technique. In this study, the researcher evaluated samples of actual social media communication by PR practitioners in social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook ad Instagram to communicate to their target audiences. This enabled the researcher to have a clear and practical picture of how PR practitioners use social media as a form of communication. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit

meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Schwandit, 2007). Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic.

According to O'Leary (2014) there are three primary types of documents as public records, personal documents and physical evidence. Public records may include the ongoing records of an organization's activities such as the mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, strategic and policy plans. Personal documents include first-person accounts of an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs. Examples include calendars, e-mails, scrapbooks, blogs, social media posts such as Facebook or twitter posts, reflections/journals, and newspapers. Physical Evidence as the name indicates includes physical objects found within the study setting (often called artifacts). Examples include flyers, posters, agendas, handbooks, and training materials.

3.6   Data Analysis

In this study, data was analysed thematically. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is used for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within data. The research objectives formed the basis of data analysis and interpretation. Thereafter, sub-themes were generated under each objective. Patton (2002) in addition, defines qualitative data analysis as working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned.

Qualitative data analysis can be described as the formal interpretation of collected data to create order, elicit meaning and communicate findings. Berg (2012) define data analysis as the process of organizing and summarizing a mass of raw data into meaningful form. (Gibbs 2007) further states that Qualitative data analysis can be described as the process of making sense from research participants" views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes, categories and regular similarities. Gummesson (2012) also offers an equally important view on analysis and interpretation of data, when he posits that the process and products of analysis provide the bases for interpretation and analysis. It is therefore not an empty ritual, carried out for form's sake, between doing the study, and interpreting it, neither is it a bolt-on feature, which can be safely ignored until the data are collected.

This research employed, qualitative data in form of text, written words and phrases describing or representing people, actions and events. Data analysis began straight from the moment of data collection. In this study, the data was analyzed while adhering to the analyzing processes, as pointed out by Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011). There were several levels of analysing data. As demonstrated by Jwan & Ong'ondo (2011) and also recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), analysis the researcher followed a six-point procedure, as discussed below:

i)   **Transcribing the data**

This is the first stage of data analysis. The transcription stage assists in familiarization with the data (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). This involves turning of verbal or non-verbal data into text. In this research, this mostly involved the data generated from the interviews and document analysis which was audio-recorded to capture the interviewee

actual responses to the questions that were framed. After collecting data in the form of interviews, and making notes from observations, the researcher turned all the verbal data given by the participants into written form.

ii)   Re-familiarizing with the data

In this stage, the researcher read every transcript generated from the interviews or informal conversations. The transcripts were read so as to form a general idea of what the data entails. After forming a general idea, the researcher deleted unnecessary words and repetitions from the transcripts. The researcher was then able to get the general direction of the data and establish the tone of the ideas (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011).

iii)   First phase coding

This stage is referred by Creswell (2007) as an "open coding", and the researcher has to conceptualize his or her work to be consistent with the research questions. During this stage, the researcher conceptualized the data and at the same time scrutinized any meanings and patterns of data that they felt was distinct and of relevance to the study. This enabled the researcher to generate codes. The researcher generated a total of 31 codes which were saved into a new word document and labeled appropriately.

iv)   Second phase coding

Creswell (2007) describes this phase as axial coding where the researcher first deals with the list of codes that are generated during the first phase coding process so as to avoid unnecessary repetition and overlaps which might be noted. At this stage, codes are merged to remove overlaps. At the end of the phase, the researcher had developed a

general overview of some themes, and sub-themes, while still maintaining the relevant information under them.

v)   Third phase coding

According to Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011), at this stage the researcher categorizes the data gathered into themes of research. This phase is referred as "selective coding" stage by Creswell (2007). In this stage, information gathered or generated is grouped into different research's themes and re-grouped further to avoid any unnecessary overlaps and repetition of the data. Thematic issues addressed in the research corresponded with the three research questions explored in this research. Each research question took between two to three themes as is shown in the findings section, with a few sub-themes under them.

vi)   Producing a Research Report

This stage involved final analysis of the data and subsequent generation of the report. The data at this stage was still in verbatim as a result the researcher embarked on stating views of the participants to the readers of the report. The researcher paraphrased contributions made by participants and retained a few verbatim responses.

3.7   Ethical Considerations

Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) observe that ethical considerations should be considered in all situations involving human participants including framing of questions, data generation, and analysis. McNamara (2004) further opines that ethical concerns in research deal with voluntary participation, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, identifying purpose and sponsor and analysis and reporting. To assist in eliminating or

controlling any ethical concerns, the researcher made sure that participation to the study was completely voluntary. The researcher in addition maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of participants so as to protect their identity. Moral principles require that research participants and respondents must be protected, have confidence in their response and participation, advocating the excellence of research, guiding against anomalies or misconduct that might replicate on the organizations and to deal with predicaments that keeps reappearing during the course of the research (Creswell, 2007).

First and foremost, the researcher sought permission for conducting the research, which was granted both by Moi University and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). This was followed by getting approval from the PR Agencies in which the researcher drew the participants of the study. The researcher used a letter of introduction which they gave to participants before engaging them. It had a clear statement on the purpose of research and assured participants of confidentiality of information. In regard to anonymity, the researcher did not include information on the organizations that they gathered data from but instead used this strategy as an access and representational strategy (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). Participants therefore felt secure when the researcher assured them of anonymity and were therefore willing to provide information.

Finally, a cover letter was done to explain the results of the study to be used in the thesis as partial fulfillment for the researcher's Master's degree. Advancement in academic fields comes through honesty and openness hence the researcher assumed the responsibility to report problems and weaknesses experienced in the study.

3.8 Trustworthiness in the Research

In this study, the researcher adhered to the rules and procedures so as to uphold the trustworthiness of the research. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is important to determine the vigor and truthfulness of the study findings. Generally, research approaches are linked with various research philosophies (Saunders et al. 2012). Therefore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher employed some mechanisms that would ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the research process as discussed hereunder:

Credibility is the truth value of the findings, and is based in the environmental context of the participants (Morris & Burkett, 2011). Jwan and Ong'ondo indicate that in order to achieve credibility in a qualitative research, the researcher has to address some of the pertinent questions by reviewing the key concepts in the study, exercising triangulation (means use of multiple approaches, techniques, methods as well as sources of generating data), providing chain of truth and evidence, and checking the members (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011).

The reliability of this study was considered high as information gathered was intended to be from interviews and relevant theories. Freberg et al (2010) explain that reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers. The respondents selected for interviews are employees of PR agencies under different capacities and in addition the research work was carried out following a proper structural process at each stage for better understanding hence confirming the reliability of the study.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) validity refers to the accuracy and meaningfulness of inferences which are based on the research results. It is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represent the phenomenon under study. The research focused on the use of social media by PR professionals and mainly targeted PR agencies aiming to improve their social media channels. The results of this study can be implemented to the PR industry as a whole.

Dependability is the extent to which the researcher provides sufficient information which is valid and clear in the entire research process. Yin (2003) describes dependability as demonstrating that the operations of a study such as the data generation procedures can be repeated with same results. That is, if another researcher applies the same methods, techniques, approaches and sources of generating data, he would have to get similar results. It also involves employing thick description by ensuring one is detailed and clear in the entire research process.

According to Gibbs et al (2007), components of thick description include recording of audio voice. The researcher used audio recorders and took notes during interviews and in addition recorded phone calls during follow up conversations. Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) posit that in a tape record, one can listen to an interview several times and discern more each time. The researcher recorded participants' interviews and checked the recording device regularly and thoroughly to ensure it was working properly. Thick description enabled the researcher to attain rich detail of the research.

Transferability indicates that relevancies can be transferred to similar situations, circumstances, and contexts (Morris & Burkett, 2011). Transferability is the "extent to

which the findings of the study or aspects of it could be relevant to or applicable to other contexts in which the study was not done or other people who were not actually involved in the study but are engaged in the issues that were studied" (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). It is the extent to which results of a study can be generalized. The findings of this study will be useful to PR professionals across PR agencies who in future may use social media as a PR tool. To ensure transferability, participants employed anonymity to ensure that the findings can be useful to PR agencies handling various organizations.

Conformability is the establishment of verifiable direct evidence from the experiences the researcher has with the people (Morris & Burkett, 2011). Jwan & Ong'ondo describe conformability as the extent to which the findings of a study are free of both internal and external influences of the researcher, participants and institution (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011). They further acknowledge that these influences may be positive and one position may ensure that data generation is easier and smoother than it would perhaps have been. In this research, the researcher acknowledged that they indeed met PR professionals with whom they had been interacting with in regard to the social media aspect. This familiarity made access and data generation easier since the researcher had established a rapport with them.

3.9   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher highlighted the research design that guided the study, the qualitative approach and the case study method used. The researcher also discussed sampling of the participants in addition generating and analysing data. The researcher concluded with the trustworthiness of the study and how ethical considerations were observed during the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the study presents the findings of the study based on the research questions: How do PR agencies use social media in their daily practice? What are the challenges faced by the PR practitioners when using social media? What perceptions are held by PR professionals on social media use in the PR practice? The analysis combined data obtained through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The analysis was highly informed by the literature review discussed in chapter two. The findings are presented in narrative form with quotations, summaries and paraphrases from data sources which the researcher deemed to be most useful.

Table 4.1: Symbols used to indicate Sources of Data

Symbol	Source of data
A1	Interview with 1st Key informant from the 1st PR agency
A2	Interview with 2nd Key informant from the 1st PR agency
A3	Interview with 3rd Key informant from the 1st PR agency
A4	Interview with 4th Key informant from the 1st PR agency
A5	Interview with 5th Key informant from the 1st PR agency
B1	Interview with 1st Key informant from the 2nd PR agency
B2	Interview with 2nd Key informant from the 2nd PR agency
B3	Interview with 3rd Key informant from the 2nd PR agency
B4	Interview with 4th Key informant from the 2nd PR agency
B5	Interview with 5th Key informant from the 2nd PR agency

4.2   Social Media use by Public Relations Agencies

The first question was: How do PR agencies use social media in their daily practice? The question was timely and cut across all the participants. As stated in the scope, this question addressed the various ways in which PR professionals use social media as a communication tool. The findings are presented as: 4.2.1 Communication and Brand Visibility 4.2.2 Relationship management 4.2.3 Content creation and marketing 4.2.4 Monitoring and crisis management.

4.2.1   Communication and Brand Visibility

Findings of the study show that PR practitioner's use social media to not only communicate with their target audiences but also amongst themselves. By using social media to communicate, PR practitioners can form solid relationships with their target audiences. For this reason, PR practitioners use various social media platforms such as Whatsapp and Facebook to keep abreast or updated with what is happening. They also use social media to exchange ideas, interests, upcoming events and activities if any.One participant had this to say:

> PR professionals are using social media to communicate with various publics directly. Platforms such as facebook, twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp cut out any third parties and send out the message directly to the intended recipient. For example, if I'm running a PR campaign and require information about a certain client or need their contacts so as to engage them more, I will directly send a message to the public relations officer handling the account on the social media platform available. There are many other PR forums actively running on Telegram and WhatsApp but the official ones are handled by the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), Media Council of Kenya (MCK) or the East African Communication Association (EACA) where I am all a member. **(A1)**

To this end, participants agreed that PR practitioners capitalise on social media to communicate relevant information, provide value, and extend conversations. During the study, samples of the official Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) WhatsApp

group indeed prove how PR practitioners communicate with each other using this social

media platform. Screenshots from the group as shown by one participant are shown

below:

Figure. 4.1: Screenshot Samples for a PR WhatsApp Group ran by PR Practitioners

Besides communication, PR practitioners were in agreement how social media has

created new opportunities for brands. Findings of the study indicate that establishing a

strong social media presence enables PR practitioners to connect with their target

audiences besides share branded content as a result create brand visibility. Participants

alluded to the fact that social media platforms provide a great avenue for a brand to connect with current and potential audiences alike, to keep up with competition and in addition, to boost a brand's visibility and popularity. It is in this regard that; PR agencies are required to create an effective brand visibility strategy. One participant acknowledged that:

> Our agency has handled brands such as Telecom giant Safaricom whereby we have capitalized heavily on the various social media platforms to successfully reach our target audiences. We have managed to attract broad audiences by keeping their attention through social media as a result growing the brand. There is need for PR professionals to develop substantial relationships with their target audiences so as to enable brands to experience interactive processes that live upto a client's expectation. A well-structured PR strategy on the use of the various social media platforms available will increase reach and transform PR efforts in creating brand awareness as a result bringing meaningful engagement. **(A2)**

Study findings indicate that social media has developed to become critical in the strengthening of brands by PR practitioners. Participants noted that PR practitioners need to establish their audiences needs and wants, what makes them more engaged and their expectations so as to create brand loyalty. Even more, participants agreed that, with the onset of social media, it is unlikely for a brand to go viral on social media without the right strategy as most target audiences seek information on specific social media platforms. Furthermore, different demographics decide what news they want to read, the method of delivery and who they'll share it with. PR practitioners must therefore ensure that they research adequately on their target audiences before creating an effective brand visibility plan.

One of the distinguishing factors of various audiences is that they can be categorized according to gender, age, location amongst other issues pertaining to a PR campaign. In this sense, one participant noted millennials as a perfect example of a specific target

audience. He acknowledged how this audience invests mostly in brands that they trust and are willing to part with any amount of money if satisfied. Furthermore, this audience has incredible passion and an adamant desire to get more information on brands that they use online. For PR practitioners, connecting with millennials requires them to be knowledgeable about their preferences which are very specific and diverse to ensure meaningful and unforgettable brand experiences. The above illustration is consistent with the following description regarding audience differences as offered by another participant:

> I have previously worked for PR agencies in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda and one thing that is very clear is that the audiences are all very different. For example, when promoting a brand in Tanzania, a PR practitioner is better off using Instagram as it's the most active social media platform besides being the most visible as Tanzanians are very visual. When it comes to Zambia, twitter is the most active. In Kenya, Facebook is big followed by Twitter. It is therefore critical that any PR practitioner considers these before embarking on any brand visibility campaign. These preferences are according to social media surveys mainly carried out internally by the PR agencies. **(B4)**

Study findings point to the fact that with the right incentives, loyal clients become brand advocates hence promoting both the PR strategy and brand standing. While in general the study points towards the necessity of social media use amongst PR practitioners, one participant noted the need for PR practitioners ensure that the social media accounts they handle have the same or at least very similar handles (their name on the account). In line with this, some participants attributed consistency in communication as key to attaining a reputable and instantly recognizable brand as a result enabling immediate ease when audiences are searching for a brand online.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that a strong online brand presence is what sells and keeps audiences besides assisting PR practitioners to thrive. Of importance to note is that

when it comes to brand visibility, an organization no matter how small is planted out there right next to its biggest competitors and in front of an ever-scrolling audience. This therefore calls for the adoption of social media by various PR firms to improve their PR in ensuring brand visibility.

4.2.2   Relationship Management

Findings of the study suggest that, relationship management has become are markable part of the PR practice as PR practitioners through social media can interact and consult better with their target demographics as a way of promoting an organisations relationship with other stakeholders. One participant noted that:

> It is true that PR practitioners use social media as a way of communicating to their audiences. Many agencies have now adapted social media as a specific function to boost their relations. We are therefore currently trying to incorporate PR practitioners who have training about social media and those with experience in the general PR function as a result creating a perfect match. The importance of understanding social media aspect as a way of creating, building and maintaining relations and how best to capitalize on it is essential, otherwise if a PR agency is stuck in the old ways, they will get lost! **(A4)**

Overall, PR practitioners have managed to reach a much wider audience through social media as compared to the traditional forums of public relations. Participants noted how word travels much faster on social media as result PR practitioners are currently using social media platforms to make announcements for product launches and company updates. The participants felt that, by communicating with the targeted audiences on social channels, PR practitioners can build relationships that are credible, authoritative and professional for their clients. Through social media, PR has come across as more friendly, warm, inviting and approachable to all stakeholders of an organization. This assists companies to be more receptive regardless of their products or services offered.

Some of the participants spoke of how social media has positively impacted the very old relationship between PR practitioners and journalists. Due to social media, it was noted how, the respective parties consult widely on any information and sources online as a result more factual information is disseminated. Indeed, findings of the study reveal that PR agencies are integrating advertisers, digital marketers and big data specialists into their teams to provide a one-stop package to their clients as a way of promoting relationships.

> Initially, we used to collaborate with journalists on a need basis. Our PR agency was entirely based on journalists known to us. However, the need to manage, especially issues dealing with client complaints regarding media coverage online, some leading to a crisis, become quite a challenge and there was need to build expertise. I essentially moved here in the end of 2013 to literally set up the digital department **(A3)**

Other participants stressed that, the impact of social media is expected to increase over time hence PR professionals need to constantly look for stories that can earn a stronger online presence and possibly become game-changers for their clients. The influence of social media on PR has without a doubt been significant as some of these changes have led to the convergence of PR tasks as well media technologies. This integration can cause PR practitioners to be at loggerheads with other professionals over control for social media.

> Many other professionals are amongst the social media bandwagon besides PR experts to ensure an effective social media strategy. We are experiencing a major merging of PR functions and by extension social media.PR agencies are integrating journalists, marketing, advertising and big data specialists into their teams so as to provide a complete package for their clients. This is because social media efforts require a full team at any given time.**(A4)**

Findings of the study reveal that, PR was previously targeted at particular persons such as celebrities, investors or business moguls. However, with the onset of social media

networks, target groups have expanded to build relationships with all parties which are fundamental to the success of an organization. There was a general agreement amongst participants that social media has made it possible for them to communicate with their audiences more directly thereby facilitating transparency, accountability and timely feedback. It is evident that, the more a PR practitioner interacts with their target audience, the more their social media posts will be visible to their audiences. Participants also acknowledged the importance of social media to be aligned to the overall organizations target audiences for a communication message to reap maximum benefits in the case of multiple channels of communication.

> It is essential to think about how to reach target audiences and furthermore, how to package the content. For some audiences, a press release would do and for others, a media invite in a paragraph form sent on WhatsApp would reach the target audience faster. The younger generation of today doesn't use email. To reach them, one has to either text them directly on their cell phone or contact them through Facebook, twitter or Instagram inbox or chat. PRO's need to note that the young people on social media today are going to be the mature and able consumers of tomorrow and as such should embrace and exhaustively use social media to engage the masses consistently hence building and strengthening online relationships**(A2)**

Participants to the study noted the diversity of client needs and preferences which as a result may pose a challenge to relationship management. There is need for a PR agency to internally brainstorm their client's needs putting into consideration their target audience, demographics and any other information before embarking on a social media campaign. They were in agreement that defining an audience is very critical in determining the type of message, tactics and channels of communication that define any social media campaign.

In conclusion, PR practitioners are required to conduct an audience analysis research and further seek an in-depth understanding of a brand before recommending how it should be

handled or else the objective of the message may be lost while seeking to boost relationships.This will largely depend on the target audience and also the nature and industry of the organization. For example, a message intended for the millennials is better off on YouTube or Facebook which is popular amongst the 18-24 age brackets unlike a press release which some millennials may not have heard of.

4.2.3   Content Creation and Marketing

All participants in this research agreed that social media is a critical factor of any well-executed content strategy. In this sense, PR practitioners have had to come up with current and creative content management strategies that address the demands of social media in an environment where traditional media demands are still in existence. Participants were of the opinion that, to generate inbound PR opportunities, PR agencies need to hype social media content as a top priority. Sharing of content increases traffic on an organizations website, in addition to building engagement and trust of what a client may be offering. One participant had this to say:

> A content strategy for social media should be the kind that evolves with times besides becoming like a one-stop-shop for the client. However, as PR practitioners are aiming to capitalize on social media usage, it is important for them to note that, not everything needs to be on social media and that it is not necessary for a brand to be shared on all platforms. As a PR practitioner, one has to choose what content is more impactful depending on which product or service they are pushing. It is therefore the job of the PR practitioner to draft a content creation strategy as part of the bigger social media plan before advising their clients on which platform is best suited for them.**(B1)**

A number of participants referred to a content creation strategy known as PESO which they use to enhance social media use. The PESO model, developed by Dietrich, integrates paid, earned, shared and owned media to convey integrated marketing and by extension PR strategies through extending reach and establishing content. Participants were in

agreement that when merged correctly, the PESO model assists PR practitioners to not only connect with their audiences but in addition build awareness, trust and authority. Successful PR strategies in content marketing address issues that are of concern to the reader and not necessarily their own personal opinions. One participant described his experience with PESO hereunder:

> When I started practicing PR around 10 years ago, we mainly benefited from earned content as our main concentration was in the profits made. With time, the quality and reach of content became important. Currently, most agencies are on shared and owned as they want to reach as many audiences and also own the content themselves. When I come across content, I start thinking about how ill disseminate my content to reach a wider audience. For instance, if a company is launching a new brand, it is important to share the brand content across all social media platforms, along with pitching them to targeted journalists and influencers. To further extend reach, consider boosting social posts on platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter and create info graphics or other branded assets that can accompany other pieces of content. **(A1)**

Participants further added that content creation is about brand visibility and should focus on creating appealing articles, webinars and other materials that contribute to a brands identity. In order to attract and retain their publics, audiences' behavior can be changed or promoted through consistently updating and creating valuable and relevant content. Participants suggested the need for PR practitioners to emulate successful content strategies both locally and globally so as to garner more ideas and to keep themselves updated. From the study, it emerged that, in addition to promoting various relationships, PR Practitioners should ensure that all the information shared strategically aligns with the standards of the brands, audiences and the PR campaign objectives. One participant observed:

> For me, my number one strategy when it comes to social media content is the importance of understanding the problem, target audience, your channels and the need to budget to increase the audience. Solutions should have an output not just an outcome. In addition, the element of immediacy is critical in content creation. Our PR agency is still working

on various strategic approaches when it comes to social media but currently responding to situations within the shortest time has worked for us a big deal. **(A1)**

Furthermore, the study confirms that the sharing of content on social media indeed creates awareness about an organisations functions and activities as a result boosting brands. In conclusion, PR practitioners need to consider that maintaining a positive public appearance on social media requires a balance of creativity, consistency and sensitivity to public opinions as one participant noted. PR practitioners are required to use social media as their first option when they want their content to reach larger audiences and in addition for brand reasoning, explanations and crisis response.

4.2.4   Monitoring and Crisis Management

According to findings on the first research question, which was how do PR agencies use social media in their daily practice? it emerged that PR practitioners use social media to monitor information on which topics drive conversations online, which social media channels had the most and the least interactions and additionally and the parties that support their campaigns. Participants indicated the need for social media content to be monitored, evaluated and created on a current and regular basis.

> You can use social media to establish who is talking, the people who are triggering a particular subject, the numbers, the hits and any other parameters that you may want. Monitoring social media assists PR professionals to track and keep an eye on a client's social media handles besides addressing discussions in a timelier and sensitive manner. **(A2)**

Monitoring tools were perceived important by participants. They noted that, PR agencies are gradually adapting monitoring tools so as to enable them get in-depth information on their clients and in addition get to know what their target audience conversations online. One participant revealed that:

I am yet to come across a social media page that does not have their already in-built monitoring tools. If you take a look at the account settings, one can actually tell the level of engagement on various posts. Initially, it used to be shrouded in mystery but nowadays one can view what impact their tweet has had, how many people liked a page on Facebook or how many have viewed or subscribed to a YouTube video or channel. As PR practitioners, we definitely use this information as a basic guide on the reach of online engagements. However, beyond the inbuilt tools we have adapted more complex digital resources such as monitoring tools likeBrand watch, Keyhole and Google Analytic which we use to acquire deeper information such as what is happening on the backend and the likely reasons why a post is not performing further than is expected. **(A3)**

It was evident that social media is popular among PR practitioners and that most of them had a strong presence in some of the leading social media platforms. This therefore makes it overwhelming for PR practitioners to at times keep up with the inbuilt social media monitoring tools. It was established that, due to the fact that social media is always on, there is need for PR practitioners to ensure that they are always updated on social media trends from any location and at any time so as to guarantee that the content is always engaging. PR practitioners should therefore be prepared with up to date tools that can assist them monitor and engage audiences. Participants had this to say:

We have our own patented monitoring and reporting tool called 'SHERLOCK' which is in partnership with "DUNLOP". We use this especially for the biggest client that we have in terms of target audiences. Through this, we monitor our web conversations, sentiments and even the conversations that key influencers are having on a specific issue as a result assisting us to adjust our social media strategy. For example, if we find that there is one key influencer, that we haven't engaged yet but keeps on appearing as a top influencer we approach them. **(B1)**

Basically, these monitoring tools aid us to track what is happening besides monitoring sentiments whether positive or negative. For example, if the monitoring tool indicates that a client like Samsung has a 60% negative rate on a new android phone, as the PR practitioner, we go deeper and find out what exactly is being discussed online and even reach out to some of the people who have posted the comments on the available social media platforms. People may be talking about the look of the phone, its battery life or camera quality. Therefore, with this kind of information that the tools can give, we are able to advise the client accordingly and control or adjust the conversations online. **(B4)**

Furthermore, participants stated that monitoring facilitates PR evaluation in terms of determining the success of PR engagement and mentions in the media. A case in study is former US president Barrack Obama's 2012 re-election campaign which was remarkably successful. His communication teams were specifically focused on social media data so as to determine the direction of their campaign messages to resonate with different audiences. Monitoring of the use and interaction of social media by the publics is important as PR professionals have been caught off balance when they realize too late that an issue has come up. One participant observed that:

> There have been incidents that are trending negatively that require immediate attention by PR professionals but unfortunately end up being addressed when it's already too late and the issue is being discussed left, right and center in the public domain. Managing this becomes a challenge because traditionally with the newspaper, PR professionals had a whole day or a couple of more hours to respond to the issue but with social media, the response requires immediate attention as a result causing a crisis. **(A1)**

During the study, it emerged that, in PR, a crisis is inevitable and that social media monitoring can be extremely helpful in crisis communication. An organization can get hit by a natural disaster, experience negative news spiraling out of control or may be undergoing financial challenges sparking media coverage. A crisis can be undeniably stressful and much is usually required of the PR and communication teams during this period. Participants hailed PR professionals who quickly respond to a breaking crisis by maintaining positive conversations. One participant had this to say:

> A crisis on social media occurs within minutes as social media is one of the first places people look for reactions on what is trending online. One negative message or rumor on any social media channel can be enough to permanently damage an organizations reputation if not dealt with quickly and efficiently. The best way to get through a social media crisis is to prepare for it. PR practitioners need to ensure their own system alerts are in place and consistent frequent follow ups on all their social media pages **(B4)**

The researcher observed that just by the click of the mouse, anyone can access any type of information online and furthermore, publish negative content targeting an organization or individual. This may be negative reviews, dissatisfied employees or a stakeholder that inadvertently leaks information. In conclusion, some of the participants suggested the need to observe protocol when a crisis hits. The protocol should not only focus on how to handle and cope with a crisis, but who should ensure a clear communication flow. A key spokesperson should be identified to avoid miscommunication or conflicting messages relied to the public.

4.3   Challenges Faced by PR Practitioners while using Social Media

The Second question was: What are the challenges faced by PR practitioners when handling social media? All respondents were in agreement that they have been faced by a myriad of challenges while handling social media. The findings are presented as: 4.3.1 the use of traditional media vs. the arrival of the 24/7 PR cycle 4.3.2 the raise of influencers and citizen journalist's 4.3.3 Inadequate social media regulations 4.3.4 Inefficient skills and training in the PR practice.

4.3.1   The use of Traditional Media vs. the Arrival of the 24/7 PR Cycle

Participants expressed how traditional PR channels are rapidly changing and taking up new dynamics as a result posing a big challenge for PR practitioners.PR practitioners are still trying to grapple with the adjustment of the transition between traditional PR channels and social media having to adversely change their PR plans. Traditional Media in the PR practice includes: newspapers, television, radio, press releases, brochures, newsletters, written speeches, billboards and letters to the editor amongst others.

Moreover, the findings confirm that PR agencies who do not implement social media into their campaigns may become obsolete in the long-term. A participant had this to say:

> Our PR agency has been involved heavily with rural communities regarding various Communication campaigns. We are handling clients that require us to be on the ground. For example, there is one based in Lamu. Our agency has a team that does door to door activation…In Lamu if let's say today is Thursday, it is when they have received yesterday (Wednesdays) newspaper. Most TV channels do not get there very well and the Internet is low. By the way if you happen to be there for like a week you realize that one can actually live without internet (laughing). As a PR professional, you have to know how to reach the people there. They have their own local ways of communication such as the use of drums or village elders to pass a message. It's a world on its own. Social media might have changed how we communicate to audiences as PR professionals but the principles of traditional media remains the same, to always think about your audience before choosing the channels to use **(B5)**

Participants agreed that the social media news cycle never ends and has grown to become a global medium that spans all 24 time zones with no definite schedules. Breaking news travels via the social media platforms available like a global pandemic exploding into news feeds across the different time zones around the world. PR practitioners therefore find themselves at the cutting edge as their action plans made in the morning may be obsolete by the afternoon. One participant noted that:

> One of the challenges include the speed of how you respond to an inquiry or issue as responding may not necessarily mean that the issue has been solved but just that it has been acknowledged. The need to plan, execute and adjust at the speed of the internet is critical as social media is accessible to anyone at the click of a button. As a result, transparency therefore becomes challenge as PR practitioners can get lost in the speed and hype that information is being generated online. Once information is out there, it's out there. At times people immediately screenshot or record information which can be in future can be used against a brand. **(B1)**

Findings also showed that, social media has challenged the quality of information communicated by PR practitioners due to the lack of adequate time for fact checking as some content may just be headline driven or at times just mere link baits most of which are not authentic or original. With client targets in play that may have strict deadlines,

rules or regulations, PR professionals therefore find their objectives at stake. One respondent noted that:

> At the end of the day, everybody wants access to information, everybody wants to know what is happening and everybody wants to be informed even when they think they don't want to be informed all the time. You'll find people who say they are not interested later change their minds especially if a story is trending online and everyone is talking about it. PR professionals initially had plenty of time to respond or address to issues but the emergence of social media has caught them off guard on how information is handled especially in the case of breaking news. Nowadays, all the publics need to do is to create a twitter #hashtag or post on Facebook or Twitter causing the information to trend and spread like bushfire**(A5)**

A number of participants reminisced how they would previously get a media mention on-air, release it in print or publish it in the next day's newspaper at their own pace as long as deadlines were met. However, social media has overhauled the entire traditional media cycle operations such as correspondence which are carried out by PR practitioners. Participants therefore acknowledged that social media has disrupted the communication field, making PR more faster-paced.

Overall, there seemed to be consistent views amongst participants concerning how social media has adversely influenced distribution channels, timing, content amongst various stakeholder groups and industries. Specifically, participants who handle government entities noted how some of their clients are yet to embrace a social media presence whereby some still prefer to use traditional media methods to rely their message. It emerged that, the social media benefits are still not clear to some individuals especially top management and organisations as some find it too sensational for them and controversial. One participant indicates the impact of social media to traditional media in government:

> In 2017, I handled a client who preferred to communicate to their publics through the traditional forms of media specifically TV, radio and newspapers. It was such a challenge as convincing them to adapt a social media strategy became almost impossible. Eventually they gave in due to pressure from competitors who were using social media to their advantage and as a result had gained immense publicity.PR practitioners need to clearly define the social media role to their clients and articulate clearly its value and usage. They can begin by slowly introducing its use for example during a product launch ad progress to a fully-fledged social media function as part of their PR strategy. **(B1)**

During the study, it also emerged that, some PR agencies are yet to establish a clear organizational role that handles social media when it comes to the organizational structure. Participants expressed howsocial media use in some organizations is unclear as a number of clientele are yet to understand its function. In some organizations, social media roles and responsibilities are performed by marketers, graphics designers or advertisers posing a challenge to PR practitioners on how to best pitch to these organizations on the importance of adapting social media besides the traditional forms of media. Participants noted that, some organizations still uphold the traditional media mind-set and tools of handling PR hence perceive social media as just another communication function limiting its potential benefits. Some of the participants highlighted glaring indicators that suggest how the PR function is attached to the human resource, marketing or administration departments in some organizations.

They noted how the management of these organizations view PR as a necessary evil besides adding an extra cost of little impact in the overall performance of the company. Participants therefore suggested the need for creating room for high-level management positions that directly deal with social media strategies. PR professionals need to learn to clearly distinguish their professional and personal lives and always keep in mind that brands and by extension clients have their own life. A number of participants noted the importance

professionalism and credibility when handling their clients to ensure that personal issues

do not emerge. One participant noted that:

> A PRO can find themselves in a situation whereby a client can end up in a compromising situation or scandal and brand association comes in directly because the PR practitioner handling the account can be blamed for the situation at hand. This can cause complicated situations especially if the PRO has been using their personal accounts to rely information. PR practitioners need to negotiate their personal identities and the identities of their organizations because of the nature of social media. They have been instances where PRO's have even gotten into depression after their clients have closed shop, for example a few years back when I interned for Virgin Atlantic and they suddenly closed shop, some of the PROS handling the account got into depression due to the attachment they had to the brand. A PRO should always use the official company handles as opposed to using their own personal handles when passing information. PRO's need to always, speak on behalf of the brand and separate the communication as a person and the communication as an organization. The use of official company handles come in handy so that incase an organization shuts down or the brand you're handling is transferred to another PR agency it becomes easier to disassociate yourself **(B6)**

Fake news emerged as another challenge facing PR practitioners when using social

media. PR practitioners interviewed cited the diversity, dynamism and vibrancy of

Kenya's online presence as a catalyst of fake news. Fake news as one participant noted is

whereby news leak out to the public without a clients' consent or approval throwing the

PR professionals into a daze if unconfirmed and false. One respondent noted the very

aggressive and diverse nature in the handling of social media by PR professionals.

> Fake news is real and has actually been amplified by social media. Kenya as a country has one of the largest numbers and most active social media users globally earning us names such as Kenyans on Twitter ('KOT') which has been recognized globally following various campaigns. This online space represents a wide range of issues and viewpoints that it becomes a big challenge to differentiate facts and fake news. When it comes to social media, anyone with an internet connection can rely a message out in seconds. This has resulted to exaggeration and untrue claims that hurt the credibility of brands. In the past, we used to strive to get the trust of media houses so as to ensure that our messages were adequately communicated which is no longer the case. Currently we thoroughly screen messages to ensure accuracy, professionalism and quality before communicating to the public. **(A2)**

4.3.2   The raise of Influencers and Citizen Journalists

This study established that the use of social media has led to the emergence of digital

influencers that PR practitioners can reach out to and work with to promote their brands.

These Influencers who can be described as social media personalities who have gained

influential online status have agreeably introduced a new aspect to PR. All participants

noted that social media influencers have substantial digital followers that PR

professionals are now capitalizing on to promote their brands. One participant revealed

that the level of engagement and interaction by influencers is generally consistently

higher than well-known, experienced or educated individuals in any field or industry. It is

prudent that, social media campaigns carried out by PR practitioners, grapevine or

propaganda targeting certain brands, organizations or specific individuals affiliated with a

competing brand or opposing side has catapulted the rise of influencers. One participant

expressed that:

> Influencers have the power to persuade people to purchase or use a certain brand just by
> posting a picture or be seen wearing or using a certain product. When PR
> professionals create relationships between brands and influencers, they are actually using
> this to their advantage as some of these influencers have become the voices of specific
> audiences. An example is Julie Gichuru, a former TV hostess turned entrepreneur who
> has a large social media following hence an influencer. Our agency has engaged her
> services to promote household brands which have really sold. Other influencers we've
> worked with include: Sports personalities such as Eliud Kipchoge and Collins Injera.
> Musicians Akothee and Size 8, Comedian Jalang'o and Churchill. It has become much
> easier to directly reach out to various target audiences as people want to be associated
> with what certain influencers are using. **(A2)**

However, participants noted the challenges they have incurred due to the raise of influencers and

how social media users are currently on the same platform with PR professionals who initially

were the main transmitters of messages. Participants generally acknowledged that PR

professionals should always follow up with what the influencers are covering and what stories they are developing. One participant had this to say:

> Several PR agencies currently prefer to engage influencers as opposed to some traditional forms of communication to pass their messages. Unfortunately, Influencers can at times be quite misleading whereby some may seem like they have the following and clout due to their own ability of creating all sorts of perceptions. There have been cases where an influencer may have more than 100,000 followers online yet in real sense only 20,000 are keeping up. Some even go to the extreme ends of falsifying their accounts and even buying followers, making people believe that their influence has an impact. It is now up to PR practitioners to verify these records by doing thorough background checks on these personalities. Their lifestyles and whom they associate with can greatly influence a brand. **(A3)**

The research also established that, a majority of influencers have their own blogs which they use to write about their daily experiences for example when using a certain product. As a result, many bloggers have a healthy social media following associated with their brands. According to the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE) formed in 2011 to support Kenya's blogging community, their annual blog awards has grown from 400 blogs in 2011 to 10,000 in 2017. The exponential growth in blogs has created an economically viable industry for bloggers who are increasingly sought by Kenyan PR professionals as a platform for communicating their messages to the publics effectively. The decision of the best channels to be used depends on the target group or positioning and needs of the brands. Besides the fact that influencers should be engaged for the benefit of a client and growth of brands, their use has however brought with it an unhealthy blurring of money and influence that unfortunately rewards cheque books over the merits of an idea. One respondent pointed out that:

> We have had cases where the authenticity of the social media Influencer comes into question whereby an influencer could be supporting Brand A today and within six months switches to support Brand B as a result confusing the audiences who may have related with the influencer more when they were supporting Brand A. This has led to audiences getting confused and as well dropping a brand. **A2)**

Another term that conspicuously emerged during the study was 'citizen journalists'. Participants alluded to the fact that social media has given regular citizens platforms where they can share their content and additionally voice their opinions. It was noted that any social media user subconsciously becomes a journalist to some extent and that this power to the people has made controlling a message incredibly difficult for PR professionals as information surrounding live happenings or events can be broadcast from thousands of different sources concurrently. In the past, only a few people would have access to certain information but with the onset of social media, anyone can take a photo or record a video to document and share via Facebook, twitter, Instagram or YouTube and immediately, the information is out in the public domain. One respondent noted how citizen journalists have impacted the PR profession:

> The subject of citizen journalists is really a great challenge for us PR practitioners. Information transmitted from any source has exposed people's lives, families and careers. PR practitioners are faced with how to pass a message without criticizing or addressing claims that may have been made by social media users. This has exposed brands and besides exposing people's lives, families or careers. We have seen a rapid increase in cyber bullying and its impact on corporate brands something that PR agencies are dealing with. **(B3).**

4.3.3   Inadequate Social Media Regulations

Participants to the study established that it was vital for the PR industry in Kenya to put in place regularized social media policies and standards that ensure that all PR practitioners are increasingly aware of the dos and don'ts of the various social media platforms. Participants admitted that the use of social media in Kenya is highly unregulated due to the traditional media standards. Participants further agreed that the increase in use of social media platforms such as YouTube, Netflix and Facebook have created a host of new challenges for regulators, government and the PR

industry at large not just in Kenya but globally. Findings of the study confirm that proper regulations in place can assist an organization to control any future legal or security issues.

PR practitioners were of the opinion that, the best approach was putting in place proper rules and regulations regarding social media use. It was evident that there is need for PR practitioners in Kenya to form standard policies that cut across all agencies and governs all the social media platforms. One participant had this to say:

> I'm yet to come across a one stop comprehensive legislation clause covering social media in Kenya. Other clauses of the law meant for other crimes are the ones being used to address social media. Our agency drafted an in-house social media policy that works within policies and regulations set by the government. There are no standard regulations specific to agencies as each has its own differing policies regarding social media use. In most policies and procedures, an agency documents how staff should handle certain situations: 'If this happens, do this or do that'. Social media is however very unpredictable as one it is difficult to tell what exact situations may arise or in many cases how staff should best handle them. Each social media network and each relationship is unique and the social media environment changes daily **(A1)**

Participants were in tandem that, social media is a rather recent communication tool in the PR industry and regulating its use by PR practitioners will definitely assist to manage various situations that may arise such as a crisis management. Most participants in senior management levels stated that the other areas that need be considered in the standardization of social media policies in Kenya include fake news, influencers and citizen journalist, breaking news, protection of minors amongst others. While it is important to incorporate social media to public relations efforts, participants noted the importance of policies which relate to this relatively new platform.

4.3.4   Inefficient Skills and Training in the Public Relations Practice

Findings of the study revealed that the extent of social media training amongst PR professionals was modest. Most participants admitted that they had drafted social media plans from their general knowledge of social media and not necessarily from any form of training. The researcher asked the participants what training they had on social media use for corporate PR and only countable had been trained specifically on its use. It emerged that, training on social media management can go a long way in addressing a number of issues in PR agencies. Participants cited the need for training on areas such as crisis management, monitoring and evaluation, demographics and measurement of social media. One participant admitted the following:

> ……I hold no specific training on social media use. However, as a PR agency, we do have the do's and don'ts. How one should conduct themselves on social media by observing the governing principles: to be truthful, fair, and beneficial to those concerned. Avoid maliciousness as it can be bad for the client. Also try not to be biased. How to handle a client is critical. A PRO should ensure that they don't break the trust of their client and additionally ensure confidentiality. If you find yourself in a place where people are discussing a client, it's best to just walk away.**(A1)**

Participants to the study were optimistic that the challenges they faced regarding social media can be solved by acquiring relevant training, knowledge and skills. Thus an example that surfaced in regard to the need for training on specific skills was on the measurement of social media. This study established that most PR practitioners relied on metrics such as followers, likes or shares to measure their public relations outcomes and training their measurement skills would have an impact on whether their anticipated information reached their target audiences. A participant had this to say:

> Measurement offers a strategic approach to handling social media as it assists in decision-making and fact checking of information. This therefore enables new approaches when handling target audiences. For example, if you want to reach millennials and have never

tried Pinterest or snapchat which are relatively new platforms, you can design a pilot and see what works. Through feedback from measurement, it becomes easier to find a traction and scale from there. **(B1)**

In conclusion, participants confirmed that, besides measurement, other key areas that require training while using social media in public relations include persuasion concepts and strategies, relationships and relationship-building, critical thinking, creative, innovative problem-solving skills and off course mastery of language in the various online platforms available.

4.4   Perceptions held by Public Relations Practitioners regarding Social Media

This section presents findings based on my third question which was: What perceptions are held by PR practitioners on social media use in the PR practice? In an attempt to answer the above stated question, the researcher sought to establish the perceptions that have had an influence on the PR practice while using social media, as well as the strategies that they use. The findings were organized under the following themes: 4.4.1 Evolution of social media use and global trends 4.4.2 Planning and research of social media use 4.4.3Stereotypes surrounding social media use by PR practitioners.

4.4.1   Evolution of Social Media Use and Global Trends

The findings of this study demonstrate how PR and social media are connected considering their very diverse history. At the forefront, PR practitioners use social media in the creation and sharing of ideas via the available online networks. Some participants recognized how Kenyans in general have always been fast to exploit new technologies hence the upsurge in social media use. Through gaining many social media followers, PR

practitioners have been able to better communicate with their target audiences. One respondent had this to say:

> When I started practicing PR which is many years ago, PR then was very different from what it is today…. the key thing clients wanted was to be in the news. At that time, the use of the internet was just beginning, for example, our office had dial-up internet which was very costly. We would fax a press release or alternatively take a hard copy to the newsroom. Phone calls were also very expensive. If my client wanted to appear in the Nation the next day, I had to personally drop the hard copy of the photo he wanted published to the news room the previous day. We used to fix the photo on a piece of paper and write a caption below it. Eventually we all started embracing technology. It started with us using Yahoo, where we would exchange emails or share our jokes through yahoo messenger. PR agencies also started adapting websites though nothing out of the ordinary was shared. For example, our website was for posting the same content that had been posted in the newspapers the next day. There was no urgency. **(A3)**

Of key importance to note is how social media gained impetus in 2008 when people began to actively use Facebook during the post-election violence that rocked Kenya. This was demonstrated by responses from various participants who indicated how social media was actively adapted to the PR practise around the years 2009/2010. Coincidentally, it is around this period when Kenya was experiencing the worst ever post-election violence that the global narrative surrounding social media use was gaining popularity. Participants describe this as the official beginning of social media use in Kenya as from henceforth, social media has grown to cut across various industries more arguably the PR industry. Social media has since expanded and developed into various forms and development of forums. Another participant added that, PR agencies had to keep abreast with the current trends or else face a myriad of challenges in adjusting to the ever changing nature of social media. One participant from one of the two agencies had this to say:

> Currently we have a whole new digital department which comprises of personnel who are specifically handling social media. We've in addition had the creation of various positions related to social media such as social media Director, social media marketers,

social media advisors, social media observers and social media researcher whose role is to specifically research on trends and information surrounding clients. Some PR agencies are yet to catch up with the trends and may soon find themselves obsolete if they don't. **(B1)**

However, despite the fact that PR agencies had adapted social media in their daily use, the study established that social media use in Kenya is yet to match that of global standards. All participants agreed that the use of social media in the public relations practice has been widely recognized locally but a lot can be learnt and adapted from global PR agencies so as to make them more competitive. On the global sphere, PR is largely making a significant contribution in various sectors and any brand or organization cannot be in operation without social media use. Participants confirmed that social media has adversely reshaped PR, with a global following in the billions. Participants agreed that the importance of following up with global patterns and trends can considerably promote social media use.

During a benchmarking trip to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) offices in Newyork in 2016, it was observed how PR is practiced rigorously. The job of a PR professional is indeed a critical one if not a matter of life and death. PR practitioners are heavily involved across all an organizations operations and functions such as decision making and advising of management on a daily basis. When it comes to social media matters, PR personnel have intensely adapted formats such as news jacking which basically refers to the practice of taking advantage of current happenings, events or news stories in such a way to promote a product or brand and ghost blogging whereby blogs and comments are posted anonymously by organizations or individuals about their own products, services or interests **(A4)**

In conclusion, participants agreed that the influence that social media has had not just locally but globally is simply too large to ignore. They add that, social media keep on shaping how PR agencies communicate their products or services**,** launch their campaigns, their growth and even how they fundraise. Participants suggested the need for

more benchmarking and research on how to best upgrade some of the local PR practices so as to match global standards.

4.4.2   Planning and Research of Social Media

Contrary to public opinion that for a PR practitioner to run the social media function all they need is the internet, the study established the importance of planning and research of social media as a powerful strategy in implementing any successful PR plan. When prompted on the strategies that they use, all participants stressed on the importance of having a plan in place that incorporates the key audiences, message, relationships and crisis management. Participants noted that, strategy involves defining of roles, setting objectives and preparing of action plans that include schedules, budgets, accountability, rules and procedures.

The outcome of this study points to the fact that social media should not only be used to communicate and interact informally but also todevelop relationships with all the stakeholders involved as a result ensuring that a client's needs are met.Contradictory to public stereotypes that a PR practitioner can handle social media as long as they are logged into any social media site, planning and strategy is in reality involved when addressing issues social media to ensure that only relevant and useful information is communicated to the publics. One participant had this to say:

> Social media has become a voice of the people and requires clarity in communicating any information. Social media content should be able to add value to the target audiences of a PR campaign be it millennials, housewives, teenagers, farmers amongst other groups. PR professionals should plan their schedules to ensure consistency in passing messages and also to avoid creating controversial situations for clients. Our PR firm internally brainstorms ta client's objectives and goals to its target audiences, needs, strategic plans and any other information before embarking on any social media campaign.**(B2)**

Participants stated that planning involves setting of Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound (SMART) goals and objectives. Participants emphasised the need for PR practitioners to develop daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly themes that can be addressed on the social media networks. Additionally, they need to review campaigns key performance indicators (KPI's) and competitors as a result come up with a calendar of events that meets all these requirements. Participants emphasized on the importance of the calendar of events to have follow up reports and meetings which will ensure a constant social media presence and keep audiences updated on the status of their clients.In regard to crisis management, respondents from the two PR agencies recognized the existence of a social media crisis management plan in place which is revised from time to time considering the dynamic nature of social media. One respondent noted that:

> You don't want to be caught unprepared, floundering or making blunders on words or actions as previously witnessed even with the most seasoned PR gurus when a crisis occurs. It is definitely good to have a contingency plan in place on how you would handle any form of bad publicity. Understanding the problem, then your target audience, after which your channel and the need to plan on how to increase your audience is very important. Solutions should be output oriented and not just focus on outcomes. **(B1)**

4.4.3   Stereotypes surrounding Social Media use by PR Practitioners

Participants narrated how even some members at top level management assume that social media is just about posting and liking photos or updating status. However, this is not the case as professionally managing any organizations social media sites requires top-notch PR and communication skills. There appeared to be some kind of dilemma on the use of social media by PR practitioners as a good number of the participants interviewed recognized that some organizations are still of the mindset that anyone in an organization

can manage their social media accounts. However, one participant confirmed that this

narrative is changing and had this to say:

> For many, there is the assumption that one can just sit on a computer and run a corporate account. In recent times, it has become mandatory for PR professionals to pursue courses in social media management, for example I enrolled for an online social media marketing Course which lasted 6 months to just understand what social media is and how to capitalize on the various avenues it has. Through the course, I also gained knowledge on how to keep pace with what is happening. We in addition carry out in-house trainings not specifically on one social media aspect but generally as a whole **(B2)**

During the study, participants further indicated the stereotype where some clients are still

held in the mindset that social media is just for a certain age group. A PR professional

should consider the various age groups before they post anything on social media so as to

meet their audience expectations. One participant noted that:

> Some organizations are of the perception that social media was made by youth for youth. However, the numbers tell a different story. In one of the internal surveys carried out by our agency on a major PR campaign we were running for one of our main clients, it was established that some of the popular social media sites had audiences ages 35 years and above as the dominant users. LinkedIn, twitter and Pinterest especially had a very high percentage of users in this category. This just goes to show the unpredictability of social media as one can never tell and is contrary to stereotypes that Social media is only used by the Generation Y's who are younger. **(B5)**

Another common stereotype that was established during the study is that all social media

platforms are equal. Equal in the number of users, activities, influence and interaction.

One participant however acknowledged that this was not the case as some social media

platforms are good for managing customer service and PR such as Facebook and twitter

whereas others are paramount for generating traffic on an organizations website such as

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. He further added that when it comes to Search Engine

Operations (SEO), social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn are ideal

whereas platforms such as Facebook, twitter and Instagramare excellent for generating sales.

Participants therefore concluded that strategy and keeping updated on what is popular or trending amongst different audiences is important. PR professionals need to clearly distinguish between the various forms of social media so as to achieve maximum advantages. Some platforms may only be in use for a short period of time whilst others are in for the long haul. It is in this regard that all participants agreed that social media is there to stay.

4.5   Chapter Summary

This chapter therefore, concludes that the widespread use of social media has evidently transformed and diversified how PR professionals communicate and share information. The study was guided by its objectives and research questions which elicited responses helpful in bridging the gap on the use of social media among PR practitioners. This chapter also addressed the challenges faced by PR practitioners while using social media. The researcher noted that social media has impacted every industry and PR is no exception. Generally, the effective adaption of PR is a prerequisite for implementing strategies by agencies and as well as managing their daily activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the study presented a summary of important issues emerging from the study in relation to the research questions. The researcher set out to conclude the findings of the three main questions, which were: Q.1. How do PR firms use social media as a tool in the PR practice? Q.2. what challenges do PR professionals face while handling social media in their PR practice? And Q.3.What are the perceptions held by PR professionals when handling social media? The researcher presented the discussion of key findings, followed by the conclusions of the study. The researcher concludes by giving their recommendations.

5.2   Summary of Key Findings

The researcher set out to investigate three main questions, which were: Q.1. How do PR firms use social media as a tool in the PR practice? Q.2. What challenges do PR professionals face while handling social media in their PR practice? And Q.3.What is the perceptions held by PR professionals when handling social media? Document analysis and informal conversations supplemented the evidence from the in-depth interviews. The key findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 5.1: Summary of Key Findings

Q.1. How do PR firms use social media as a tool in the PR practice?
• The use of Social media has changed the way that PR practitioners communicate with their publics who include employees, customers, stakeholders and governments.
• Findings revealed that PR practitioners use social media platforms for communication and brand visibility, content creation and marketing, relationship building and management and for monitoring and evaluation.
• Defining key audiences is a very important for any public relations strategy and determines the social media messaging platforms.

Q2. What challenges do PR professionals face while handling social media communication in their PR practice?
• Participants stated that a major challenge they faced while handling social media was the fact that the social media news cycle never ends as it is a global medium spanning all 24 time zones.
• The raise of influencers and citizen journalists has led to the rapid proliferation of smart phones and tablets turning everyone into a reporter with the power to reach a massive audience within minutes. This is a challenge to PR practitioners as control and influence of target audiences is altered.
• Some organisations still perceive PR as an extension of other departments and in addition fill PR's top management with managers from other fields. This therefore poses challenges in their daily operations specifically regarding the use of social media.
• Inadequate social media policies are also another challenge that arose from the study. There seems to be no standard policies and guidelines in place in regard to the approach and use of social media use by PR practitioners in Kenya.
• Inefficient skills and training by PR practitioners in handling issues such as a crisis management and fake news or news leaking out to the public without a clients' consent or approval. Also PR practitioners seem to lack enough expertise on the measurement of social media considering its nature, cost, time constraints and what to measure.
• Social media is always changing. The social media platforms trending today are different than those in use a year or decade ago and the social media platforms in use in the future will likely be different than now.

Q3. What perceptions are held by PR professionals regarding the use of social media use?
• PR has evolved from fully relying on traditional forms of media to embrace the various forms of new media. Most participants acknowledged that planning and research should be employed while handling social media so as to ensure target audiences are reached.
• A common stereotype held by some organisations is that the use of social media puts their privacy at risk. Participants also indicated that some clients are still held in the mindset that social media is just for a certain age group.
• All participants agreed that the use of social media in the PR practice has been widely recognized as an essential part of modern PR in addition making significant contribution in various sectors globally.

5.3   Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of social media amongst PR practitioners in 2 PR agencies in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was guided by three specific objectives including, examining how PR professionals use social media in their daily practice in Kenya, to identify challenges that come with the use of social media by PR professionals and to evaluate the perceptions held by PR professionals on the use of social media.

Overall, based on the findings of the study, four key issues emerged out of the aforementioned research questions. Social media comprehension in the PR practice, Influence of audiences on social media use in PR practice in Kenya, policies and guidelines regarding social media use in Kenya and finally training of PR professionals which appear as a common phenomenon across all the research questions. These are presented as 5.3.1; 5.3.2; 5.3.3; and 5.3.4 respectively.

5.3.1   The Extent of Social Media use in the PR Practice

Key findings of the study confirmed that PR practitioners use social media for communication and brand visibility, content creation and marketing, relationship building and management and finally for monitoring and evaluation. These findings are in line with scholars such as Effing et al (2011), Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), and Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) who are all in agreement that social media is about online interactions and connections. Figee et al, (2017) however, acknowledge that public relations scholars have struggled to articulate the competencies, capabilities, or skills required in the PR practice. This was evident in this study whereby participants pointed out that social media is a

relatively new PR tool that is evolving very fast and the need to keep abreast as a PR practitioner has in some instances been overwhelming.

One aspect that predominantly featured in this study is the fact that most scholars who have researched on the influence and use of social media in the public relations industry focused solely on American contexts for example McNamara (2016) and Waters et.al (2010) and in addition mainland European settings such as L'Etang et. al (2006) with countable studies in Africa and more specifically Kenya. Preliminary studies reveal that very little research has been carried out regarding the use of social media in public relations despite the country showing tremendous use of social media.

From the literature review of the study, it was evident that PR scholars are striving to attain both understanding and clarity regarding the use of social media in the industry. The researcher noted that a universal definition of both the terms public relations and social media remains elusive. In public relations, (Bryer & Zavatton, 2011) indeed concede that there are many definitions of public relations. The main reason for this is that the industry itself is always changing and adapting to the world and growing power of the media both old and new. In the same line, there exist several definitions on social media. However, most scholars seem to revolve around Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), who define social media as a group of Internet, based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC.

Although the different definitions of PR cover important aspects of the practice and its roles, the issue of founding and sustaining relationships by PR practitioners through

communication remain fundamental and feature in most of the definitions (Curtin 2011, Cernicova2016, Bernays 2013, L'Etang 2013, Rusk off 2003, Cutlip et.al., 1985).Hitherto, literature reviewed in relation to social media potential largely incline towards positive outcomes through enhanced communication between PR practitioners and their publics, particularly the key publics. In this regard, literature demonstrates that social media has the capacity to promote two-way communication between PR agencies and their publics.

The general reactions of PR practitioners in this study alluded to the claim that the emergence of social media has changed both PR theory and practice creating the need to come up with better strategies of handling it. New technologies have allowed the practice to better develop a dialogue with its publics, evolving towards Grunig's two-way symmetric communications model (Theaker, 2012). This perhaps underscored the notion that social media is yet to be fully exploited by PR practitioners in Kenya as the study sought to reveal. This finding is consistent with Grunig and Hunts (1984) theory that posits typical ways in which public relations is practiced through the four models of public relations. As such, various discussions and research on PR have focused mostly on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models that help in understanding the diversity of functions, practices and communication directions of PR approaches that could be summed up as mostly functional and to some extent relational PR approaches.

Of importance to note is that Grunig and Hunt (1984) theorized the two-way symmetrical PR model based on the authoring works of PR practitioners such as John Hill, Ivy Lee, and Edward Bernays (Grunig 1992). These PR practitioners pointed towards the potential

importance of dialogue between PR practitioners and their publics. This study therefore demonstrates that the two-way symmetrical model is deemed the most ethical model, one that PR professionals should aspire to use in their everyday tactics and strategies (Hopkins, 2014).

In their study however, Alfonso and Miguel (2006) differ with (Grunig, 2009) and state that new media do offer a way to increase two-way symmetrical communication but that current practice at least in terms of online press rooms did not achieve this. An overall lack of interactive features that should solicit feedback or input from key stakeholders are limiting opportunities for public relations practitioners in local agencies to collect information and monitor public opinion from individuals, as well as regional, and state entities. Hence in line with the problem statement of this study PR professionals need to be more strategic while handling social media so as to maximize on its advantages.

As evidenced in the study, Robson and Sutherland (2012) echo that with the current media climate, PRO's need to be considering social media as part of their Communication Strategy. All through the study, it was obvious that social media has had an impact on most if not all PR operations. This goes in line with (Broderick 2013) who notes that despite the differences, communication exchanges that take place online are equally significant to those that occur offline. Social media use in crisis management and employee communications significantly, positively predicted professionals' perceptions of social media's aggravating impact e.g., extended work hours and increased workload on their work (Jiang et al, 2017).

In conclusion, PR practitioners and the organizations that they represent need to learn from each other through a facilitated mutual dialogue (Grunig 2009). To this extent, the findings of this research reiterate that a PR practitioner's failure to listen to their audiences' opinions and survival needs hinders mutual communication, mutual learning and mutual dialogue. As revealed in the findings, relationship building and management as captured in the interpretation of the Grunig and Hunts model entails PR practitioners and their stakeholders working together in pursuit of a relationship that enables the flourishing of all the other traits (Grunig 2009).

5.3.2 Influence of Audiences on Social Media use in PR practice in Kenya

Indeed, findings of the study reveal that the PR industry must continuously adapt to the use of the ever dynamic and diverse social media tools so as to reach their target audiences. From the study, it is no doubt that social media has impacted nearly every industry but has had a profound influence on public relations and media professions. Therefore, findings that social media has revolutionised the entire PR industry are consistent with Gorry & Westbrook, who opine that the role of social media will always be primarily the creation of communities and enabling of conversations among their members (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). It is therefore important for PR practitioners to prioritize their audiences in the use of social media so as to enhance communication in their PR practice.(Davis, 2008) reiterates to the fact that, the internet has become a primary source of information making communication possible not necessarily through face to face but anytime and anywhere. It is instantaneous and the importance of the geographical location is highly reduced.

In the same breath, fast and affordable internet in major cities and towns in Kenya has enabled the countries growing class of digitally skilled citizens to create content and alternative sources of news and information. Participants noted that the rapid proliferation of smart phones and tablets has turned everyone into a reporter with the power to reach a massive audience within minutes. This finding opines with (Kaplan & Blakley 2009) who state that audiences have the power in their own hands to transform their personal social networks by connecting and developing intimate bonds with unfamiliar people.

While the above finding is consistent with past research that demonstrate that demographics are an important aspect to any PR practitioner, this study goes ahead to identify some of the audience categories. The study foregrounds that before crafting a Communication or PR plan, PR practitioners need to have a deeper understanding of their target audience and understand the brand thoroughly before recommending what should be done or else the objective of the message may be lost. Wright and Hinson (2012) consistently found that there are dramatic changes in public relations practice in the sense that changing technology continually empowers professionals to communicate strategically with external and internal audiences. For example, a message intended for a millennial is better of making use of YouTube or Facebook which is popular amongst the 18-24 age brackets unlike a Press Release which some millennials may never have heard of before.

Breakenridge (2008) argues that focusing on essential influencers is vital. Essential influencers command a certain level of following in the online social media spheres,

which makes them important links to an otherwise unreachable public. Furthermore, Grunig (2009) recommends two-way communication, which involves communication from the organisation to the public and vice versa. In addition, he points to the importance social media could have for this type of dialogic communication. Both social media and public relations gravitate around exchange of information, which supports contentions from public relations practitioners claiming positive results through social media use (Phillips and Young 2009).

This research therefore considered both the voices of PR practitioners and their audiences on social media with respect to the practice of two-way symmetrical model of communication. This introduced the importance of considering both sides of the two-way symmetrical model in PR communication bringing out the differences in perspectives and perceptions of PR practitioners and their audiences. The findings of this research as a result provided significant evidence about the influential role that social media has on PR practice across different contexts.

Other studies have revealed that PR professionals should focus more on the expectations and needs of the audiences and how to serve them as a valued resource rather than focus on the channels used. Participants noted that, clients have very different needs and preferences which largely depend mainly on the target audience besides the nature and industry of the organization which agrees with Distaso and McCorkindale (2012) who stated that the significance of social media in the PR field is impossible to ignore. This is because social media is now essential for organizational operations. This argument complimented an earlier assertion by Shultz and Goritz (2016) indicating that

embracement of social media is no longer a strategic business option, but a necessity, and a huge opportunity.

Most importantly, participants expressed their satisfaction about carrying out a social media audience checklist. These includes but are not limited to the audiences age, education levels, geographical locations and online interests, preferred social media networks and types of content an audience is likely to consume. In addition, PRO's can encourage their audiences to follow their links by adding social media buttons to their websites, marketing materials or sending audiences an email inviting them to connect with them. PR professionals are responsible for managing and protecting the online reputation of their clients via the publication and promotion of additional content and community engagement. They can also initiate conversations with their target audience by posting content online which they think would be of interest to them. They can also engage them directly by asking them questions or responding to their comments.

The study confirmed how PR has been synonymous with media relations through the PR/journalistic relationship. In contemporary PR literature, media content has been categorized into four 'quadrants' that is paid, earned, shared, and owned, referred to as the PESO model in academic research (Trench, 2017). This strategy generally ensures efficiency and effectiveness when using social media by PR practitioners. When the four media types are integrated, influencer engagement, partnerships, and incentive programs are promoted. The PESO model provides a holistic picture of the many channels that influence audiences behavior in the decision-making process as a result, PR practitioners are adopting its communication framework to manage their efforts in reaching specific audiences.

In conclusion, the findings of this research provide insights into understanding the relationship between PR practitioners and how they can best understand their audiences in their daily practice. PR practitioners in Kenya and even globally can refer to the findings of this research to assist them understand the needs of their audiences. This information is useful for PR practitioners seeking to develop strategies for engaging their stakeholders over social media.

5.3.3 Social Media Regulatory Frameworks in the PR Practice

The findings of this research demonstrate that there seems to be inefficient standard regulations and guidelines in place in regard to the approach and use of social media by PR practitioners in Kenya. There is limited information on guidelines, rules and regulations governing the use of social media posing a challenge when a crisis occurs. Each PR agency has its own way of handling their social media platforms. Most PR firms have established their own policies and guidelines in regard to the handling of social media whereas some clients have also established theirs hence the need to find a middle ground. The Kenyan Government should explicitly support regulatory frameworks set in place regarding the use of social media by players in the public relations industry.

The challenge however is that many companies do not know how to best organize a good social policy besides ensuring that its employees actually read it. Despite the importance of social media, meaningful gaps exist between what is happening and what should be happening in terms of all the social media (Wright and Hinson, 2009). The discussion ignited feelings of confusion in the minds of the participants who acknowledged that

organizations are still lacking appropriate structures, cultures and strategies for participative modes of online communication. Subsequently, new ones are needed.

The study expresses the need for policy makers to include the voices of PR professionals in the development of mitigation strategies regarding the use of social media in Public Relations. Well planned and coherent policies on social media are needed to limit potential crisis and give the chance of succeeding greater odds. For example, if the government establishes a clause in a policy regarding crisis management, PR agencies should be consulted as this is one of the ways that they use social media as indicated in the study.

The findings of the study reveal that Kenya's telecommunications sector is regulated by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK, 2017) which was established as an independent agency by the Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA) (Maina,2017). Furthermore, the state has increasingly sought to have content removed online with government officials, politicians, and religious leaders pointing to certain laws, religion or morality as justification in certain cases. The increase in the number of influencers in the recent years in Kenya has created a vibrant online sphere witnessed through "bloggers for hire" who use their collective clout on Twitter and Facebook to manipulate the online information landscape and shape public opinion.

This finding is critical for public relations policy makers as the Kenyan judiciary has made several moves to protect the fundamental rights of citizens online in the past few years. In April 2018, the High Court of Kenya ruled unconstitutional the Communication Authority's plan to implement a Device Management System (DMS) introduced in

January 2017 that would have provided the authority with access to mobile subscriber data, including call data records.

Defining and prosecuting crimes committed on social media has become a challenge as most of the laws available cut across all industries and are not specific to the public relations industry. For example, freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 33 of Kenya's 2010 constitution and includes the right to seek, receive or impart information and ideas, while Article 31 provides for the right to privacy. These rights, however, do not extend to propaganda, hate speech, or incitement to violence. Hate speech is penalized under the 2008 National Cohesion and Integration Act, a law that was passed in response to widespread ethnic violence following the 2007 general elections. Individuals found guilty of spreading hate speech, broadly defined, can be fined up to KES 1 million (US$11,000), sentenced to up to three years in prison, or both (Mutegi, 2016).

Findings of the study further demonstrate that PR professionals have faced increasing intimidation and even violence in extreme cases for their online activities in recent years. While consumers often drive social media content, policymakers and government organizations can also become powerful forces on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The government at times requests for content to be removed from popular online platforms, such as Facebook and Google.

The new Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, passed in May 2018, threaten to further restrict online freedom of expression. The law imposes penalties of up to 10 years in prison for the publication of "false" or "fictitious" information that results in "panic" or is "likely to discredit the reputation of a person." In June 2018, the Bloggers

Association of Kenya (BAKE) successfully appealed 26 problematic provisions of the law, which were subsequently suspended until the court could hear the case. (Maina, 2017)

Previously in April 2017, the High Court ruled Section 132 of the penal code unconstitutional which had penalized "undermining the authority of public officers" and had been used to prosecute online and offline speech. Section 29 of the Kenya Information and Communications Act (KICA) was separately ruled unconstitutional in April 2016. Section 29 had penalized bloggers and social media users for using ICTs to disseminate messages deemed to be "grossly offensive" or to cause "annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another person," with a fine of up to Kshs. 50,000, three years in prison, or both.

Accordingly, the new Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, passed in May 2018, imposes penalties of up to 10 years in prison for the publication of "false" or "fictitious" information that results in "panic" or is "likely to discredit the reputation of a person. In June 2018, the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE) successfully appealed the problematic provisions of the law, which were subsequently suspended until the court could hear the case. This finding reiterates the need for policy makers and stakeholders in the public relations Industry to develop standard policies that address social media so as to regulate the use of the various platforms.

Regarding the ethics of social media, PR scholars such as Bowen (2013), Hopkins (2014) and McNamara (2014, 2015) have drawn attention to the ethical problems created by some new media formats and practices. In an analysis of PR and journalism, McNamara

has warned that "convergence" between journalism and PR is growing in the hybridized media environment that is evolving and needs to be addressed with clear "rules of engagement" (McNamara, 2015).

This is similar to the findings of the study whereby the relationship between PR practitioners and journalists has taken a turn for the better following the onset of social media. Public relations practitioners have to strive to overcome the bad reputations of "spin doctors," who twist the truth to suit their clients' needs. This is because most PR practitioners believe that PR does not emphasize on online ethics. This is in tandem with (Hopkins 2010) who states that PR practitioners do not practice PR ethically when executing PR roles online. In other words, there are ethics that PR practitioners adhere to in conventional practice such as honesty, transparency, and accountability. However, they may not exercise these ethics when using online tools to practice PR. They also may overlook the ethics of Internet communication, such as privacy, in their endeavors to achieve their targets.

Previous research indicates that, some of the biggest ethical challenges pertain to the company's integrity, advertising and marketing practices, recruitment procedures and negligence. The study also revealed that, another ethical concern arose when PR professionals are at times torn between using the social media platform for the benefit of an organization or for personal gain. While use of social media in the workplace can be a challenge, this is largely due to productivity and compliance concerns. The study realized that, navigating social media ethically can be especially challenging since the tools keep changing as companies strive to stay current, entertaining, and engaged. Many ethical dilemmas naturally occur considering the multiple stakeholders of any organization. As

more organizations become comfortable with social media, more risks have arisen. Considering the negative perceptions surrounding social media by some organizations, the researcher recommends that PR professionals should keep social media sites updated and professional and in addition come out clearly when explaining the benefits and advantages of social media to their clients.

Bowen (2004) notes that scholars contend that ethics ought to be a generic excellence principle in public relations. In other words, ethics should be a central component of PR practice. Ethics in PR plays a vital role in communication as it brings the credibility to the profession. It in addition assists to establish faithful relationships between organizations and the public. Excellence in PR can be achieved by ethical practices. It is important for PR agencies to follow the code of ethics so as to provide reliable services to the target audience. PR professionals need to ensure that the codes of ethics are practically implemented for the betterment of all the stakeholders.

Another key issue that emerged regarding ethics in the study was transparency. Transparency is a topic that regularly appears in both trade and academic publications relating to social media. Rawlins (2009) defined transparency as: The deliberate attempt to make all legally releasable information whether positive or negative in nature in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices. (p. 75). Rawlins further contended that simply disclosing information does not constitute transparency, because it requires stakeholder participation as well as organizational accountability. Transparency was most often associated with

three tenets: Being open and honest; reporting the bad with the good; and providing information in a timely manner.

Generally, this study is in agreement with Amila (2016) who gives six pillars of ethics as trustworthiness which includes honesty, integrity, reliability/promise-keeping and loyalty. The second pillar is respect which comprises of civility, courtesy and decency, dignity and autonomy, tolerance and acceptance. The third pillar is responsibility which entails accountability, pursuit for excellence and observing self-restraint. The fourth pillar is fairness which involves processes, impartiality and equity whereas the fifth pillar is caring and finally the sixth one citizenship.

The findings of this research reaffirm the significance and importance of standard regulations and ethical procedures regarding the use of social media by PR practitioners. Generally, PR professionals are required to be professional and ethical, to respect their audiences and avoid using ethnic slurs, personal insults, and obscenity or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable to their audiences. They should only address accurate and honest content, and their own opinions should be identified as such.

In conclusion, social media policies also referred to as social media guidelines or social network guidelines describe and provide advice on how social media communications shall be dealt with by all of the members of an organization and how it can enable all of them to become communicators in participative online environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This has been further reiterated by MacNamara (2015) who analyzed the need for social media guidelines and found them critical to helping employees understand the boundaries of their social media activities relating to their employer.

5.3.4   Training of Social Media use in the Public Relations Practice

From findings of the study, there is need for in-depth training, discussions and research by both PR practitioners and organisations that they handle on how to best integrate social media ideas into the larger PR strategy. There is a lack of control of what is being said online, which is a major concern for PROs and organizations (Gordon, 2011). The demand for 24 hour stories and content in the media is a major challenge for the industry (Butterick, 2011).Social media has changed the landscape for communications and empowered publics, who are able to post, share and republish information easily and quickly. This has forced PR professionals to build and maintain positive relationships with active consumers as well as with bloggers, community managers and other gatekeepers on the social web.

Mbogo (2011) sought to research on training needs assessment for PR officers in Public firms in Nairobi. She used the survey design. Her findings indicated that public relations professionals in most organizations lack training in many areas of their profession such as events management, budget, public speaking, pitching, strategic thinking, presentation skills and team building. PR practitioners are urged to pursue relevant courses on social media use, handling and management that are currently being offered by various institutions in Kenya. Short courses offered include creating rigorous online strategies, how to engage effectively on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, optimizing the online space for search, provoking multimedia buzz and digital crisis communications.

The study established that PR agencies need to hold consistent trainings that address matters on the dominant online social media platforms, executing powerful campaigns on

social media, engaging stakeholders, creating and managing YouTube channels as a hub for video blogging, podcasting and multimedia outreach, optimizing online output for discovery in Google searches using the science of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and also using twitter and micro-blogging for intelligence, outreach, engagement and crisis communication. Moreover, the study notes that, measurement is an essential part of the overall communication process and therefore PR professionals need to receive adequate training on the measurement of social media. Participants agreed that PR professionals are faced with the question of providing a Return on Investment (ROI) on all their social media efforts.

A number of PR practitioners are yet to understand social medias ROI and therefore do not know where how to begin measuring the results of some programs. (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009) state that to measure success, we must determine what success looks like in this new environment. Social media has altered public relations metrics, but the system is still the same. (Solis and Breakenridge, 2009) further opine that because social media is rooted in conversations, participation and engagement, it introduces new track able elements into the formula for determining ROI and success: conversations or threads by keywords, traffic, leads or sales, calls to action, engagement, relationships, authority, education and participation, perceptions, registrations, membership and community activity. As the use of social media increases, so does the importance of creating standards and understanding that measurement is required to be truly effective. Ultimately, research supports the efforts to move beyond the simple counts such as "Likes," followers, and comments, to more outcome measures such as the level of audience engagement, share of voice, and sentiment.

As a result of the dynamic technological developments, responsibilities are seldom assigned and training for employees as well as guidelines for online communications and key performance indicators to measure success is frequently missing (Fink and Zerfass, 2010). It is in line with this that PR practitioners are encouraged to read and research so as to grasp modern public relations. Setting aside time to inquire on the happenings online on a daily basis is advised to enable them understand their niche and the social media platforms their target audiences prefer to use. It is therefore important to understand an organization, its mission, vision and core values, its target audiences, bloggers and journalists at large before reaching out to address the social media phenomena. The researcher noted that, PR teams that emphasize the importance of research and training are miles ahead in terms of social media.

The study revealed that, some organizations did not and still do not have a communications department and those who do have employed journalists. It is important to note that journalists carry out different functions than PR professions. PR agencies need to invest and train employees who have a PR background. Ndegwa (2017) however acknowledges that the PR arena in Kenya today is still a work in progress. In line with training, PR practitioners should also educate their staff to be feeble and polite when addressing publics through social media. PR professionals should avoid using controversial language and mind the content that they share online. Information shared should promote the goals, mission and vision of the client.

Generally, participants were of the opinion that, for a successful training programme it is essential to know the audiences' expectations. Similarly, the need to further engage and

train social media influencers who will generate genuine engagement between brands and their audience by PR professionals is also critical when handling social media. Influencers should be individuals with integrity and the capability to create long lasting relationships with the brands they are representing, giving them a voice they could never use on their own.

5.4   Conclusion

This study sought to establish experiences of PR practitioners while using social media as a PR tool in their communication initiatives. Using the case study research method, the researcher held in-depth interviews with 10 key informants and used informal conversations and document analysis to supplement the interview data, which was then analyzed and presented thematically. The main argument of the study is that participants in the two PR agencies studied saw the need of social media when they wanted to create social change and have active socially conscious audience engagements.

Given the findings of the study, social media has made the PR practice more challenging for PR practitioners because it requires a diverse and ever-expanding collection of skills and proficiency especially with the rise of new social media technologies every day. However, the research concludes that social media presents numerous opportunities for organizations to communicate with their publics if utilized well. There are now boundless opportunities to listen, understand and engage with audiences and create advocates and communities through social media, something which can be a powerful enabler for brands and organisations. It is therefore critical for PR professionals to

explore people-to-people, people-to-content or content-to-content tactics that social media affords its users.

Following the research objectives and research questions of the study, social media is a tool if used well by PR Professionals can assist in decision making and policies of how organizations engage in relationships with and between publics in communication. In spite of increased social media adoption by PR agencies, communication researchers have yet to understand their consequences for organizational processes (Treem and Leonardi 2012). The understanding among communication and PR researchers is even more wanting in the case of Kenya, which positions this research uniquely in the quest to establish how the usage of social media has changed the way that PR practitioners communicate.

Furthermore, as social media is being accepted as an integral aspect of PR operations in other parts of the world and continuing to grow, there is need for PR professionals to speed up its transition in Kenya so as to make organizations realize and appreciate its worth in their success. This research, therefore sought to position social media as a key organizational function contributing to the advancement of PR as a whole.

Overall, the findings of the study gave an extended overview of the impact that social media has had on the PR profession in Kenya. Social media has infiltrated nearly every industry and is no longer a secondary thought in the public relations industry but an integral part of the field. Public relations practitioners now have to change their strategies in order to make sure that they engage their audiences in the best way possible. The adoption of social media applications by PR professionals are still at their initial stages in

comparison to global standards. The majority of government initiatives such as the Communications Authority of Kenya (CCK) focus mostly on participation and transparency and less on collaboration as is the requirement of social media. Nevertheless, the initiatives and milestones made by PR professionals can be used as springboards for further research and expansion. Therefore, the researcher concludes that, because of the very nature of social media which is constantly changing, all the discussed implications must be researched on a very regular basis. This is in line with Phillips and Young (2009) who state that PROs cannot be sure which communication channels, tools and platforms will be relevant in 2020.

5.5   Recommendations of the Study

The key contribution of this study is that it highlighted social media use by PR practitioners, the challenges they face and how social media can be enhanced to improve their daily practice. The researcher therefore highlights the recommendations of the study which will be useful to PR practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders as a whole. The recommendations elicited by the research objectives and questions are discussed below:

i)   Improvement of content management to compliment social media use

The findings of the study revealed that content creation and marketing was one way in which PR practitioners use social media. It is on this basis that the researcher recommends that PR professionals should only seek to focus on relevant content regarding their clients and the fact that not all content is news and requires social media attention. There is need for PR practitioners to make the most of significant and current topics trending on social media that will assist them to create appealing content for their

target audience besides tying their PR campaigns to trending topics. A PRO should aim at having their client being amongst the top 3 when their organisation is searched online.

ii)   Professionalism when handling social media

Considering the negative perceptions as observed in research question three, the researcher recommends that PR practitioners should keep social media sites updated and professional and in be clear when pitching the benefits and advantages of social media to their clients. They should strive to do away with the sensationalism, criticism and controversy that turn some clients and organisations away. The researcher also indicates consistency as an essential part of professionalism as audiences want to see regular and engaging content from any PR professional.

iii)   Capacity building for social media use by PR practitioners

The findings and discussions of this study brought to the fore the fact that there was a deficient in core competencies, skilled and knowledgeable personnel to support social media use in PR agencies. It is in line with this that the researcher suggests that PR agencies should aim to not only offer the traditional mix of PR but in addition create a content strategy for social media becoming a one stop shop as has been practiced by global PR agencies. The researcher suggests combining PR and social media by interlinking all social media accounts and cross linking to PR tactics.

iv)   Social media training and management

This research recommends that the top leadership in PR agencies should invest more resources that result in improved social media management as a basis for offering quality services. To attain this, PR leadership must strive to offer continuous and rigorous

professional and skills training. PR agencies should ensure that they hold regular strategy sessions and that their clients are highly trained. It is in this light that the researcher recommends the need for PR practitioners to develop protocol for staff in the online presence specifically corporate leaders who are brands with a large following on social media. It is evident that, some of the Chief Executive Officers (CEO'S) and Managing Directors (MD'S) are brands in their own rights and should be cautious of what they post on the various social media platforms even if personal as this can affect the brands they manage.

v)   Monitoring and Evaluation

The researcher recommends that PR practitioners should adapt Online Media Monitoring (OMM) submit reports daily. This will assist them to strategically create more engaging content and build upon it. Preferably, PR agencies should establish a team that can keep an eye on what is happening online 24 hours. PR professionals are recommended to monitor the impact of any social media happenings to allow for consistency in communication. The researcher recommends the need for PR agencies to adapt current and effective monitoring tools that meet global standards in their practice.

vi)   Crisis Management

The findings of the study revealed that most crisis situations begin online and that PR practitioners should aim at perfecting their response when it comes to social media crisis communication. Participants to the study agreed that a crisis can be used to the advantage of a PR agency if responded to effectively. It is in this regard that the researcher recommends that PR practitioners need to focus more on capitalizing on a crisis no matter how negative it may get. PR agencies should avoid covering up a crisis as this will only

worsen the damage. Instead they should manage the situation by taking responsibility, reacting immediately, and responding to feedback.

vii)   Regulation of social media policies in the PR practice

Overall, the study revealed that there is need for the establishment of national mechanisms to regulate social media use by PR practitioners in Kenya. These mechanisms should seek to bring together stakeholders, trainers, media regulatory bodies, research institutions and any particular body in PR with stakes in promoting the use of social media in Kenya. In line with this, the researcher suggests the formation of a standard regulatory body for PR practitioners in Kenya which can run independently or under the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK). The researcher proposes that the regulatory body can be referred to as the Public Relations Social Media Association of Kenya (PR - SMAK) which will guide PR practitioners on how best to utilize and handle this phenomenon.

viii)   The Global Sphere

The researcher recommends the adaption of global portals by PR practitioners where they can share notes and if possible attend global training in different countries just to touch base on social media and share best practices is critical to entrench best practices in the industry through the application of policies, research, case studies and wider knowledge of the science of communication in developing and implementing enlightened and credible PR programmes and strategies.

5.6   Suggestions for Further Research

While this study revealed the utilization of social media use by PR practitioners, future studies may seek to investigate other strategies that can handle the ever evolving nature of social media. Some of these current strategies such as sentiment tracking, popularity analysis and the exploration of User Generated Content (UGC) can be further pursued by PR researchers globally. Furthermore, the researcher faults previous works for not clearly establishing the significance of influencers and citizen journalists in relation to social media and public relations and could therefore be another area for further research.

Whereas this study identified gaps regarding the utilization of social media by PR practitioners, further research would be necessary to establish whether the gaps have been filled or not. Of importance to note is that the social media platforms used by PR practitioners indicated in this study may be considered incompetent in the future considering the very fast evolving and changing nature of social media. The researcher therefore suggests the continuous and regular need for further research on emerging trends and new technologies concerning social media and how PR practitioners can handle them as they come. From the study, the future of social media is unpredictable, and studies that can address this will be relevant and current. Only time will tell whether the forms of social media currently in use will still exist in years to come. There is therefore an opportunity for other researchers to explore this phenomenon further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide for PR Practitioners

1.   **How do PR firms use Social Media as a tool in the PR practice?**

  i)   When did your organization adapt the use of social media as a PR tool officially and how have you progressed so far?

  ii) What was the need that led to your organization into exploring the use of social media and what are the benefits so far?

  iii) What infrastructure has been put in place to facilitate the handling of Social media by your PR firm?

  iv) How do you control and track movement of Social Media and how effective are these mechanisms?

  v)   Is there any outstanding social media campaign you have undertaken? What was your experience and main lessons learnt?

2.   **What challenges have you faced regarding Social Media?**

  i)   What challenges have you faced along the way regarding Social Media and what are the future prospects?

  ii) Is the kind of training you pose relevant in handling Social Media currently and do you think that you need additional training and skills?

  iii) Are there any Rules/ Policies, structures and decision making process in place in regard to the use of social Media?

  iv) Are there any ethical principles are in place to ensure the effective communication of Social Media by PR firms is achieved?

v) What metrics do you use to measure the success of your social campaigns?

3. **What are the perceptions held by PR professionals regarding the use of social media use?**

   i. Is there a strategic approach in place for managing Social Media to enhance Public Relations?

   ii. What changes would you recommend in connection to the strengthening of Social Media in a bid to enhance Communication at your PR firm?

   iii. What recommendations/suggestions or/and advice would you give towards improving Social Media use in PR firms?

   iv. In your own view, what would be the best way that the PR Industry in Kenya can improve their Social Media function in regard in comparison to global standards?

   v. In your opinion, what is the future of the use of social media in public relations?

Appendix II: Letter of Introduction

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH THESIS

I am a Master of Science student in Communication Studies at Moi University. I am required to submit as part of my assessment a Research Thesis. Consequently, I have embarked on thesis writing and its title is *"**SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION AMONG PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS: A STUDY OF PR AGENCIES IN NAIROBI, KENYA**."*

The purpose of this letter is to request you to avail the necessary information. This information will be used purely for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Findings of the study shall be availed to you upon request.

Your assistance and cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Larissa A. Odini

SHRD/PGC/011/14

Appendix III: Letter from Moi University

MOI UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
OFFICE OF THE COORDINATOR
NAIROBI CAMPUS

Tel: (020) 318372

P.O Box 63056-00200
NAIROBI
KENYA

Fax: (020) 342272

MU/NRB/SHRD/SA/01

26th July 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: **LARISA ODINI CHELOTI – REG. NO. SHRD/PGC/011/14**

This is to confirm that the above named is a Postgraduate student of Moi University, School of Human Resource Development, Department of Communication Studies. Ms. Cheloti is pursuing a Master of Science in Communication Studies course offered at the Nairobi Campus.

The student has completed her course work and has successfully defended her proposal. Ms. Cheloti has been cleared for data collection. Please accord her the necessary assistance.

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully,

S. GACHEWA
COORDINATOR, SHRD
NAIROBI CAMPUS

Appendix IV: Letter from NACOSTI

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Telephone: 254-20-2213471,
2241349,331097 ,2219420
Fax:-254-20 318245,318249
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website : www.nacosti.go.ke
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete
Off Waiyaki Way
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref No **NACOSTI/P/16/73167/10471**

Date **27th May, 2019**

Larissa Odini Cheloti
Moi University
P.O. Box 3900-30100
ELDORET.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on *"Social media communication practices in public relations: A study of two agencies in Kenya,"* I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nairobi County** for the period ending **8th April, 2017.**

You are advised to report to **the Chief Executive Officers of the selected Agencies, the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit **a copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The Chief Executive Officers
Selected Agencies.

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO9001:2008 Certified

Appendix V: Research Permit

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MS. LARISSA ODINI CHELOTI
of MOI UNIVERSITY, 0-200 NAIROBI, has
been permitted to conduct research in
Nairobi County

on the topic: SOCIAL MEDIA
COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN PUBLIC
RELATIONS: A STUDY OF TWO AGENCIES
IN KENYA

for the period ending:
8th April, 2017

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/16/73167/10471
Date Of Issue : 27th May, 2019
Fee Recieved : Ksh 1000

Applicant's
Signature

Director General
National Commission for Science,
Technology & Innovation

Appendix VI: Work Plan

WEEKS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Proposal Writing	▓	▓														
Proposal Defense			▓	▓	▓											
Submission of proposal		▓														
Chapter 1		▓														
Chapter 2		▓														
Chapter 3		▓														
Data collection			▓	▓												
Data Analysis					▓	▓										
Compilation of Chapter 4&5					▓	▓										
Completion of thesis draft							▓	▓								
Submission of Final thesis															▓	▓
Miscellaneous	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓

Appendix VII: Budget

ITEM	COST(KSHS)
Proposal Preparation	
Stationery	1,000
Spiral binding	200
Miscellaneous	1,000
Sub total	**2,200**
Data Generation/Analysis	
Stationery	1,500
Phone Communication (Credit)	2,000
Travelling	5,000
Miscellaneous	1,000
Sub-total	**9,500**
Final Report writing	
Stationery	1,500
Binding	3,000
Miscellaneous	2,000
Sub-total	**6500**
Grand Total	**18,200**