



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE ON THE CAPABILITY OF PUBLIC
RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS TO MANAGE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: A CASE OF SELECTED STATE-
OWNED ENTERPRISES IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA**

BY

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OCTOBER 2021

DECLARATION

I, Mufaro Nesongano, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis entitled: *Examining the effect of organisational structure on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms: A case of selected State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia* is my original work, and that I have not previously, in its entirety or part, submitted it to any other university or Higher Education Institution for the award of a degree.


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ABSTRACT

Social media has had a significant impact on the practice of public relations since the emergence of digital media. Organisations around the world have had to embrace social media platforms to support or facilitate communication. However, the use of social media has varied from one organisation to another. Experiences of using these platforms for public relations activities have also varied among Public Relations Practitioners (PRPs). This has been attributed to various factors, including, among others, PRPs ability to operate or use these platforms. Structure, defined as rules and resources, can influence how employees' function in any organisation. Structure thus assumes that a set of rules and resources available to PRPs to manage social media platforms is at the core of an organisation's operations. Thus, using a qualitative approach and Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, this study examined the effect of organisational structure on the capabilities of PRPs to manage various social media platforms with a specific focus on commercial State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Namibia. The study found that structure does impact how PRPs in State-owned Enterprises manage social media platforms. Findings showed how rules and resources in organisations could influence PRPs use of social media platforms. Based on these findings, the study argues that there is a need to understand the influence of 'structure' as a starting point towards effectively enabling PRPs to use social media platforms for communication purposes in organisations.

Keywords: Public relations, Public Relations Practitioners, Social Media, Structure, State-owned Enterprises

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DEDICATION

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ABBREVIATIONS

BC	Before Christ
EU	European Union
EXCO	Executive Committee
IPRA	International Public Relations Association
MICT	Ministry of Information and Communication Technology
NUST	Namibia University of Science and Technology
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
PC	Personal Computer
PR	Public Relations
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
PRPs	Public Relations Practitioners
SOEs	State-owned Enterprises
US	United States
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the study. It provides the background of the study, the problem statement and outlines the research objectives. The chapter further discusses the significance and scope (delimitation) of the study and defines key terms in the context of the study. Lastly, the chapter also provides an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Study

The rise of new communication technologies, specifically digital media, has significantly advanced in the last 20 years and shifted the way communication occurs in people's lives and the way we conduct business (see Duhē, 2007; Uzunoğlu & Onat, 2012). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which emerged around 2004, have been at the forefront in changing the communication landscape (Wright & Hinson, 2014). Many organisations have embraced the use of social media to connect with various audiences (Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015) and have also sought to leverage the benefits that have come with the shift from the traditional one-way communication model to a two-way communication approach. With the rise of social media, many organisations have acknowledged that audiences also have power over the message, which was the preserve of organisations only (Matthews, 2010). Public Relations Practitioners in various organisations have alluded to the significance of social media in supporting their core activity, which is connecting with various audiences (DiStaso & Bortree, 2014).

Public relations, understood as the management of strategic relations through communication, consider social media as a useful communication tool for many organisations (Kent & Taylor, 2014). Matthews (2010, p. 17) maintains that "social media has revolutionised corporate communications, rapidly changing how public relations campaigns or programmes are distributed and measured. Rather than the traditional method of pure output, social media has forced corporate communications to shift to a dialogue in which the stakeholders, and not just the companies, have power over the message". Existing literature provides evidence on how social media has been used for public relations purposes, mainly to connect and build relations with audiences (see Fotis (2015); Krishan (2015)). Literature also points to challenges associated with the use of social media

platforms for organisational communication. For instance, works done by Lee (2013), Theaker (2008), Moreno et al. (2015), Aula & Laaksonen (2010), Çömlekçi and Güney (2016) and Graham and Avery (2013) confirm that some Public Relations Practitioners have struggled to embrace social media because of limited skills as well as lack of policy or guidelines on the use of social media for organisational communication.

While literature acknowledges some of the challenges associated with the use of social media, there is very limited research that has focused on the influence of 'structure' on the use of these platforms among Public Relations Practitioners. Structure is a central concept in Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. According to Giddens, "structure" is a virtual order; that is, structure does not have a physical existence, rather it is manifested in and through routinised activities involving the applications of rules and the manipulations of resources (Ma, 2014). Giddens also talks about the 'duality of structure', which involves the identification of the relationship between the individual and the social forces that act upon it (Lamsal, 2012). It can be viewed in terms of how people's actions affect structures, affecting future actions (Lamsal, 2012). Thus, agency and structure are interrelated. Based on Giddens's view of structure, this study examined the effect of organisational structure (rules and resources) on how Public Relations Practitioners use and manage social media platforms in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Windhoek, Namibia. SOEs were chosen as subjects of interest given their very nature of having policies (rules) that create a particular working environment.

State-owned Enterprises are defined as organisations where "the state has significant control through full majority or significant minority ownership. Due to the varying forms of ownership, State-owned Enterprises provide governments with flexibility, though they may also serve to complicate ownership policy, make them less transparent and insulate them from the legal framework applicable to other companies" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). Furthermore, Weylandt (2017, p. 2) posits that a "State-owned Company" is a company incorporated under the Companies Act in which the State is the sole or majority shareholder. In terms of Namibia, the Ministry of Public Enterprise (2019) is the custodian of all 98 State-owned Enterprises. Out of these, 22 operate on a commercial basis. Each State-owned Enterprise is meant to play a meaningful role in the country's development". According to Weylandt (2017, p. 6) the "commercial, public enterprises are meant to "provide a product or render a service in the best interest of the public". Since SOEs are created to make a meaningful contribution to the country, keeping the public up to date on the progress of this development is critical. Social media has thus provided an avenue where PRPs can

interact with the public. However, it is important to note that data relating to social media in Namibia tends to look at the total usage of the various mediums and not specifically organisational usage. Despite the growing literature on social media usage and public relations, there is a lack of research examining how organisational structure supports or hinders public relations activities on social media in Namibia. Through employing qualitative research, this study sought to bridge this gap.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social media has revolutionised public relations, rapidly changing how Public Relations Practitioners engage and communicate with various publics (Wright & Hinson, 2014). According to DiStaso & Bortree (2014), social media has become an integral part of corporate communication. Despite this shift in communication, studies have observed that the experience of Public Relations Practitioners with the use of social media has not been uniform. While some have easily embraced these platforms, others have struggled to adapt and have experienced challenges in managing social media. Some of the challenges are personal, such as limited skills for operating social media platforms, while some arguably emanate from the working environments of Public Relations Practitioners. For instance, in some organisations, Public Relations Practitioners are allowed to 'freely engage on social media platforms while in some cases, the extent to which Public Relations Practitioners engage is limited by various organisational factors.

In his structuration theory, Anthony Giddens (1984) talks about how structure can influence communicative practices. He sees a close connection between 'structure' and agency. Limited research has examined the influence of structure, as defined by Giddens, on Public Relations Practitioners' approach to using and managing social media platforms. On this basis, this study examined the effect of structure on the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage various social media platforms within State-owned Enterprises. Specifically, the study focused on PRPs in commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study's main objective was to examine how organisational structure, as explained above, informed Public Relations Practitioners' approach or ability to manage various social media

platforms in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia. The following sub-objectives were addressed:

- To explore the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia using social media;
- To assess how “rules” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia influence Public Relations Practitioners of various social media platforms; and
- To assess how “resources” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia inform Public Relations Practitioners use of social media.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is important because the findings provide insights into the influence of structure on the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to execute their roles. It is also important as it provides an opportunity for State-owned Enterprises to relook at the organisational structure and the role of the Public Relations Practitioner given the interplay of rules and resources and how they can affect agency among PRPs. Furthermore, examining the use of social media among PRPs from the structuration perspective allows the study to expand the existing knowledge base on public relations and social media.

1.5 Delimitations

The study focused on Public Relations Practitioners and their use of social media platforms for public relations purposes in commercial State-owned Enterprises. However, it must be noted that their experiences may not be reflective of other Public Relations Practitioners who did not participate in the study.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Public Relations - The practice aimed at building and managing an organisation’s reputation through trust-building with various stakeholders via the use of multiple mediums (Almfleah, 2017).

Social Media - is a computer-based technology that facilitates sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities (Dollarhide, 2020).

State-owned Enterprises - State-owned Enterprises are organisations where the state has significant control through full majority, or significant minority ownership. Due to the varying forms of ownership, State-owned Enterprises provide governments with flexibility, though they may also serve to complicate ownership policy, make them less transparent and insulate them from the legal framework applicable to other companies (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015).

Structuration Theory - "Structure" is regarded as rules and resources recursively implicated in social reproduction. Furthermore, Giddens states that rules are normative elements and codes of signification while resources are composed of two kinds: authoritative resources, which derive from the coordination of the activity of human agents, and allocative resources, which stem from the control of material products (Giddens, 1984).

1.7 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 – This chapter discusses the general overview of the study. The background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and scope of the study (delimitation) are discussed in this chapter. Definitions of key terms in the context of this study and the outline of the thesis are also provided.

Chapter 2 – This chapter reviews existing literature on public relations and the use of social media. It provides a global, regional, and local perspective of the influence of social media in various organisations and the influence of structure (rules and resources) on Public Relations Practitioners use of social media. The chapter also discusses structuration theory as a theoretical framework guiding this study. It examines the key concepts on structuration as postulated by Giddens and scholars such as Jesper Falkheimer.

Chapter 3 – This chapter focuses on the research methodology used to address the research objectives of this study. The chapter describes the research design, philosophy, data collection and analysis techniques and procedures, respondents, and matters relating to ethics and trustworthiness of findings.

Chapter 4 – This chapter presents analyses and discusses the findings of the study. The study's findings focus on the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in State-owned Enterprises in

using social media platforms, rules (policies) and the use of social media among Public Relations Practitioners and resources and the use of social media among Public Relations Practitioners.

Chapter 5 – This chapter draws conclusions on the main findings in line with the study's objectives. It also provides recommendations regarding the effective use of social media by Public Relations Practitioners in organisations such as State-owned Enterprises.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. Introduction

This chapter provides a historical overview of public relations by emphasising different periods that have influenced its evolution. The chapter also examines the development of social media and its influence on public relations in various contexts. The chapter reviews the literature on the use of social media for public relations and challenges experienced by Public Relations Practitioners in using social media for public relations purposes. Furthermore, a global, regional, and local perspective on the influence of social media in various organisations is explored. The chapter also provides a discussion on the theoretical framework guiding this study.

2.1 Defining Public Relations and Social Media

A literature review search indicates that different organisations and scholars have defined public relations in various ways. There is no single definition, but multiple versions exist to explain the different understandings of public relations (see Grunig, 1992; Theaker, 2016; Watson, 2011). Scholars have argued that how public relations is defined is dependent on how it is practised in different contexts. Although definitions have varied from one scholar to the next and from one organisation to the next, there is evidence that public relations' purpose, role, and significance is the same (see Akpabio, 2009; Heerden, 2004; Kitchen, 1997).

In 1987, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) defined public relations "as the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Skandari (2004), as cited by Gilaninia, Taleghani, & Mohammadi, 2013, p. 47),. Mckie & Sriramesh (2017, p. 1) contend that PR is an "applied professional practice and an academic field. Both offer communication centred and research-based ways to understand, inform, and intervene to adjust relationships between ideas and individuals, groups, and societies". Concurring with the latter, Almfleah (2019) considers public relations to be the practice aimed at building and managing an organisation's reputation through trust-building with various stakeholders via the use of multiple mediums. Furthermore, the Public Relations Association of America (2018) defines Public Relations as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial

relationships between organisations and their publics". Forsey (2018) describes PR from the perspective of public relations professionals and thus asserts that PR practitioners help a business or individual cultivate a positive reputation with the public through various unpaid or earned communications, including traditional media, social media, and in-person engagements. Forsey (2018) further states that PR practitioners help clients or organisations defend their reputations during a crisis that threatens their credibility. Public relations significantly affects the management of relationships between organisations and various stakeholders (Theaker, 2016).

In defining social media, Dollarhide (2020) maintains that social media is a:

computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content. This content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos. For businesses, social media is an indispensable tool that companies use to find and engage with customers, drive sales through advertising and promotion, gauge consumer trends, and offer customer service or support.

Similar to defining public relations, many studies provide their own definition of social media, while others assume that there is some common meaning. Social media can be considered a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others (see Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymoura, 2011; Valentini, 2015). In providing more insight into social networks Boyd & Ellison (2007, p. 211) describe them as web-based services that allow individuals to:

1. construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system;
2. articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and
3. view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Furthermore, Picket (2014) states that

A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organisations) and a set of dyadic ties between these actors. Social networking sites offer

people new and varied ways to communicate via the internet, whether through their Personal Computer (PC) or their mobile phone. Some major social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter and Skype.

Historically, Boyd & Ellison (2008) believe that the first known modern social network site was SixDegrees.com launched in 1997 which allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and surf the Friends lists. Research from Picket (2014) found that between 1997 and 2001, the following social networking sites emerged AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, and MiGente that allowed users to create profiles and have friends. Additionally, Picket (2014) continues by stating that the next wave of social networking sites were Ryze.com which was launched in 2001, allowing people to influence their business networks. Furthermore, Boyd & Ellison (2008) state that Friendster which launched in 2002 was a social supplement to Ryze. From 2003 onwards, several social networking sites appeared, such as Myspace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005 and Twitter in 2006.

Research done by DiStaso & Bortree (2014) found that social networking sites, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram, were popular amongst online adults. In corroborating the popularity of these social networks, Brenner (2018) found that 77 per cent of the US population had a social networking profile – a number that has grown from just a modest 10 per cent in 2008. Furthermore, Brenner advances that in the business world, Facebook marketing has become popular among organisations, while YouTube has mostly been used to share video content and Instagram has mainly been used to share photos. Brenner (2018) also posits that Twitter has become a relevant online news source, while LinkedIn has been specifically geared towards the business community. In Europe, Eurostat (2020) found that in 2019 the four most widely used social media networks by European enterprises were:

1. Social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing, and others;
2. Corporate blogs or microblogs such as Twitter and others;
3. Multimedia content-sharing websites such as YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and SlideShare; and
4. Wiki-based knowledge-sharing tools.

Statistics by Eurostat (2020) noted that 53 per cent of European Union (EU) enterprises used at least one of these types of social media. In the African context, mobile phones and social media platforms for various purposes has equally grown exponentially over the years (Nyabola, 2017).

Having defined public relations, social media and social networking sites, it is important to emphasise, as claimed by Duhē (2007), that the practice of public relations has been influenced and transformed by numerous factors, including the communication landscape of the day. Thus, the discussion below will focus on the historical development of public relations.

2.1.1 The Development of Public Relations

The development of public relations can be traced back to about 3 000 years ago (see Watson, 2011). The acts of public relations seemed to have emerged from the works of early rhetoricians, press agents and other promoters who were at the forefront of its establishment. Rhetoricians such as Gorgias of Leontinium in Sicily (ca. 483–375 Before Christ (BC)) believed that it was more important to foster persuasive skills than to determine if arguments and claims are true or false (see Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, 2012). According to Bates (2006, p. 6), “historians agree that Julius Caesar wrote his Commentaries as propaganda. Recognising the power of news to mould public opinion, Caesar published a daily paper - Acta Diurna (daily acts” or “daily records) that continued for 400 years”. Furthermore, Bates (2006, p. 7) maintains that:

public relations continued to develop even during medieval times, using the “new media” of that day, such as the Bayeaux Tapestry, a woven wall hanging that extolled the Norman of England in 1066. It was not until the Renaissance and Reformation that the foundation of the modern world arose - and with it the underpinnings of the public relations that has become vital to the management of public and private institutions.

Heerden (2004) is of the view that the usage of the term public relations began to appear in the USA around the 19th century, where the American Revolution dealt with various public relations activities aimed at influencing public opinion, managing communication and persuading individuals at the highest levels. It is also believed that public relations in Europe began more or less at the same time as in the United States (Watson, 2011). Additionally, Watson (2011, p. 44) explains that:

In 1893, the industrial giant Krupp set up a news bureau in Germany while in 1910 the Marconi company sent out their first news release in the United Kingdom. In 1937 Finland had their first public relations association called the Propagandaliitto. In 1955 the International Public Relations Association was founded and introduced the first codes of professional practice and ethics (The “Code of Athens”) widely adopted from 1965 onwards.

In 1989 public relations spread in post-communist countries, and as in the mid-90s, the internet spurred its growth.

Grunig (1992) provides four models that explain the development of public relations. According to Grunig (1992), the first model was the press agency/publicity model, which P. T. Barnum highly promoted in the mid-19th century. This model greatly focused on getting the most publicity for organisations through using hype or exaggerated messages, and P. T. Barnum is known to have used it for his circus activities. Furthermore, Grunig (1992) states that at the beginning of the 20th century, the second model, the public information model, arose to respond to the attacks that most government agencies and corporations were getting from muckraking journalists. The aim of this model was to counter the propaganda that had become a way of communication of the press agency model (Grunig, 1992). Through the public information model, organisations hired journalists who were tasked with writing stories that highlighted the good occurring in the organisations. The press agency/publicity model and public information model represented one way of communicating from an organisations' point of view. In pointing the limitations of the first two models, Grunig (1992) postulates that Edward L. Bernays used behavioural and social sciences to inform his approach to public relations. The work of Bernays saw the introduction of a scientific approach to public relations, an approach that supported a more interactive form of public relations (Grunig, 1992).

According to Grunig (1992), the first two-way model of public relations was the two-way asymmetrical model, as put forward by Bernays. In this model, Bernays believed that people were manipulatable for either good or bad. Therefore Public Relations Practitioners could use this model to manipulate people for the good of an organisation. The second model was the two-way symmetrical model, which used research and two-way communication to benefit both the organisation and various stakeholders. Table 1 summarises the various models of public relations according to Grunig (1992).

Table 1: Characteristics of Public relations according to Grunig

Characteristics	Model			
	Press Agency/ Publicity	Public Information	Two-way asymmetric	Two-way symmetric

Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of Information	Scientific Persuasion	Mutual Understanding
Nature of Communication	One-way, complete truth not essential	One-way, truth important	Two-way imbalanced effects	Two-way balanced effects
Communication Model	Source to receiver	Source to receiver	Source to receiver and feedback back to the source	Group to group
Nature of Research	Little; 'counting house'	Little; readability, readership	Formative; evaluative of attitudes	Formative; evaluative of understanding
Historical Figures	P. T. Barnum	Ivy Lee	Edward L. Bernays	Bernays, educators, professional leaders
Where is it practiced today?	Sports, theatre, product promotion	Government, non-profit associations, business	Competitive business, agencies	Regulated business, agencies

Adapted from: (Sharpe, 2000) as cited by van Heerden (2005, p. 61)

Apart from the four models that PRPs might adapt when communicating, the roles that they find themselves in also influences their abilities to execute their tasks. PRPs tend to either be managers or technicians. According to Dozier (1992), as cited by Diga and Kelleher (2009, p. 441), they found that “managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations programme outcomes. In contrast, technicians carry out the “mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions by others”. Supporting this notion is a study done by Rampjapedi (2016, p. 15) which further notes that “technicians spend most of their time writing, producing and placing communication messages. However, technicians barely have a seat at the management table

and do not have a voice in the organisation's strategy; they only execute. While managers tend to focus on communication strategies, monitoring an organisation's external environment for issues that might impact the organisation and helping the organisation adapt to the needs of its stakeholders". However, it must be noted that PRPs have been influenced by the advancement of technology, which has resulted in a shift from the Grunig's model of public relations to a more complex model where new media influences how the public interacts with organisations (see Duhē, 2007; Uzunoğlu & Onat, 2012).

From an African perspective, Rensburg (2003, p. 148) states that "the evolution of public relations on the continent, in general, and South Africa, in particular, goes back decades, if not centuries. The application of certain public relations techniques originated at the dawn of African civilisation. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs proclaimed their achievements through word pictures on impressive monuments". Though Keenan (2003, p. 180) points out that "even though Egypt has a fascinating and documented past extending back 6 000 years, there is little in the history of ancient Egypt that is relevant to modern public relations".

According to Rensburg (2003, p. 148), "the concept of public relations was practised in Africa long before the era of colonialism. He drew a parallel between the task of a Public Relations Practitioner and that of a spokesman at the Chief's seat of power in traditional South African villages. According to tradition, no African Chief or elder statesman spoke directly to a visitor who called at the Chief's seat of power".

The modernisation of public relations, according to Anani-Bossman (2018), is attributed to British colonialists. Kiambi (2014) postulates that public relations was beneficial to the colonialists in the late 1940s, who used it to build better race relations with the local communities through consultative efforts. Furthermore, Verwey (2014) points out that between 1957 to 1994, public relations in South Africa developed and evolved through different phases such as fundraising and publicity, and press-agentry, to the more sophisticated two-way relational approaches and, ultimately, into management counsel and advice. In South Africa, the field grew due to the developments in education and research and the establishment of a professional body in 1957 known as the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA). According to PRISA (2021), the institute aims to represent professionals in public relations and communication management throughout the Southern African region. Over the years, it has expanded and has registered practitioners in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. In Tanzania, according to

O'Rourke (2010), as cited by Constantine (2013, p. 24), a study revealed that "organisations have been using social media to promote dialogue and meaningful interaction between organisations and their stakeholders. The use of social media has become a priority area for organisation information sharing because it is possible to influence social change".

However, there is a paucity of research relating to the history of the development of public relations in Namibia. This could be attributed to many Namibian organisations and government institutions struggling to outline the value they derive from Public Relations Practitioners (Mutambo, 2014). A study done by Ikosa (2013) on challenges relating to the growth of PRISA Namibia found that membership to the body was not compulsory, unlike lawyers and accountants who, by law, are required to be members of their respective associations. This was attributed to the absence of laws obliging PR practitioners to be a part of PRISA Namibia. Additionally, although the PR profession was rapidly growing, it is not taken seriously in Namibia.

2.2 Global Perspective of Social Media Use within Organisations by Public Relations Practitioners

Globally social media has emerged as an essential tool for public relations professionals (see Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010; Krishan, 2015). Prodanova & Looy (2018) identify social media as one of the most important instruments to enhance information flow and relationships between individuals and organisations. According to Fotis (2015, p. 16), "the benefit of utilising social media in organisations is that "social media is all about facilitating the ability of people to express and share ideas, thoughts, and opinions with others. It is also about enabling people to connect with others. For many businesses, social media provides an opportunity to boost customer satisfaction, loyalty, engagement and even sales". In Europe, it was further found according to research done by Eurostat (2020), that in 2019, 45 per cent of EU enterprises used social media to develop the enterprise's image or market products while 29 per cent of enterprises used social media to obtain or respond to customers' opinions, reviews or questions and the percentage of enterprises using social media to recruit employees was 28 per cent in 2019.

Research that has been done about public relations and social media has mainly focused on its usage within organisations. Edosomwan et al. (2011) agree that social media, in its different forms, has provided increased channels of communication since people can send messages through an instant messenger or a tweet and get responses quickly. Leonardi, Huysman & Steinfield (2013) emphasise that organisations tend to use social media for organisational communication with external parties,

such as customers, vendors, and the public. Research has also shown that organisations use a multipronged social media strategy to communicate with external parties. Abzari, Ghassemi, & Vosta (2014) found that some organisations use social media to collect information from consumers to improve how consumers view them. DiStaso & Bortree (2014) and Erasmus (2012) further highlight that social media has become very integral in their communication and is critical for companies to build connections with the public.

Moreno et al. (2015) maintain that social media has profoundly altered the relations between organisations and their stakeholders due to its ability to disseminate content, provide interactivity, and foster lasting relationships. Widespread access to the internet through various personal devices has further empowered stakeholders to act as key players in reputation management, thus giving them significant leverage over the very future of many organisations.

Almfleah (2017) observes that many Public Relations Practitioners have experienced challenges in using and effectively managing social media platforms for public relations initiatives. Further research done by Smith, Blazovich, & Smith (2015) states that organisations are challenged to determine the best social media platform they must use. This is due to consumers different preferences and needs that make one social media platform more desirable than another, resulting in companies using multiple platforms. Additionally, Clăra (2020) also points out that organisations cannot always determine how stakeholders interpret the information they post.

Additional literature from the European context established that some Public Relations Practitioners are not well-equipped to use social media for their work (see Lee, 2013; Moreno et al., 2015). Some companies have struggled to make use of social media (Aula & Laaksonen, 2010), and research conducted by Çömlekçi & Güney (2016) found that Turkey was equally looking at better ways of utilising social media within the scope of the European Union. Wright & Hinson (2014) also point to the significant challenges Public Relations Practitioners face due to the changing communication landscape. In their view, new media has significantly changed the manner communication occurs and the rules it follows. Equally, these tools have changed how business relationships have been maintained over the past decade. DiStaso & Bortree (2014) claim that social media poses another challenge in that with a multitude of evolving platforms, organisations need to adapt to serve their stakeholders on these platforms quickly.

Schein, Wilson & Keelan (2010) point out that some government institutions tend to be slow in adapting to change, and by the time they do so, users' behaviour will have evolved, and the conversations will have also moved to other platforms. Equally, the multiple layers of policy and processes don't always address the public's current needs, requiring information instantaneously. Thus, El-Taliawi (2018) found that a social media policy is important for governments to harness its benefits. However, a few European countries have a comprehensive governance framework to manage social media (see Macnamara, 2010; Sutherland, 2012; Zerfass, 2015).

Even in Austria, Macnamara (2011) found more than 65 per cent of private and public sector organisations have no specific policies or guidelines about social media use by employees, while 23 per cent of organisations have no social media policy or guidelines for employees at all, whereas 67 per cent of organisations provide no training for employees using social media related to their work. Consequently, Macnamara (2011) found that few organisations have a social media strategy with clear objectives, integration with other public communication and evaluation.

Some of the challenges that were identified from literature were that Public Relations Practitioners continued to make use of social media in the same ways they used the traditional media - as a means of dumping messages on the general population rather than as a strategic means of interacting with the public (Grünig, 2019).

Research has revealed that there are benefits and challenges associated with the use of social media in different organisations (see Evan et al., 2011; Almfleah, 2017; Uzunoglu & Onat, 2012). Sun, Lau, & Kuo (2002) maintain that the Internet has altered public relations principles. Bria (2018) continues by saying that the impact of social media on organisations and the type of changes provoked by their adoption remain unexplored.

2.3 The African Perspective of Social Media Use within Organisations by Public Relations Practitioners

From an African perspective, Moyo (2015, p. 63) notes that “when African countries are ranked against each other, South Africa’s use of social media is much higher than the others”. Research done by Botha, Nchabeleng, & Bisschoff (2018) on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in South Africa found that many of them saw several positive spin-offs that emerged from using social media. Some of these were increasing NGOs access to their audience and different stakeholders; allowing NGOs to adjust communication quickly, where necessary; increasing the

speed of different stakeholders' feedback and input, as well as reaching specific audiences, international and youth, on specific issues. The South African Government has developed a communication policy that equally highlights the important role social media plays. According to Government Communication and Information Systems (2018, p. 34), "social media platforms have been gaining acceptance in all spheres of government worldwide. This provides an opportunity for two-way communication between government and citizens, partners and stakeholders; where the frequency and speed of engagement have increased". The policy highlights the manner government entities should manage their social media accounts. A study done by Sakali (2017) found that social media had been used in the Kenyan immigration department to improve communication with their citizens. In another study by Cutlip (2006), as cited by Aggrey (2009), found that public relations in the government/public sector had at least three things in common when it came to their usage of social media:

1. The need for government/agencies to notify stakeholders of their activities;
2. To make sure that there is cooperation in developmental programmes and that the regulations are fulfilled; and
3. Getting their citizens to support them.

Additionally, Inya (2017) emphasised that social media has aided the flow of information within and outside of universities in Nigeria. Even though this study's main focus is on State-owned Enterprises, a study done by Ade-Johnson (2014) on the usage of social media in insurance companies points to its important role in organisation communication highlighting the following:

1. Organisations should embrace the use of social media in their marketing;
2. Companies should embrace using social media to monitor insights about themselves and their operations from stakeholders;
3. Responding promptly to queries on social media, companies can realise growth and improve the perception of themselves from stakeholders; and
4. Since social media is interactive, companies should leverage this to get information from their clients.

According to research by Philip (2014), on the continent, commerce is at the heart of what is spurring the surge in social media use in organisations as they try to harness the popularity of various social media platforms to boost their bottom lines.

2.4 The Namibian Perspective of Social Media Use within Organisations by Public Relations Practitioners

According to Sam (2019), the advent of social media communication technology has changed the patterns of communication worldwide, and Namibia is not an exception. Scholars say, “social media has increased both connectivity and participation in all spheres of social life” (Sam, 2019). Moreover, Mutambo (2014) concedes that despite the establishment of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) to harmonise ICT functions under one umbrella, communication remains painstakingly uncoordinated and fragmented across government institutions (Offices, Ministries and Agencies); there seems to be no centre of public relations.

Social media has to some extent, been embraced to support Government communication, although the extent and success of such initiatives have not been extensively measured (Remmert, 2019). A study done by Matali (2017) found that social media has brought a paradigm change in the communication process in Namibia as a communication tool. Thus, Ikosa (2014) advances that Public Relations Practitioners need to continuously update their knowledge on the various social media applications they need to communicate with their audience. In signalling the importance of social media in communication, the Namibian Government, through the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, drafted a Social Media Use Policy and Implementation Plan to direct how social media is used within various government departments (Tweya, 2016).

Current statistics are limited to social media users and the popularity of various social media platforms (Kemp, 2021). There is, therefore, a lack of research in the Namibian context that has examined the use of social media by Public Relations Practitioners in different organisations (see Shehu, 2019). Jario (2019) further questions the value placed on public relations in organisations as it is seen as a nice to have and not an essential part of the organisation.

Another challenge observed in social media usage by Public Relations Practitioners in Windhoek, Namibia, is how some organisations treat it like a static platform (Leonard, 2021). Mutambo (2014) also states that few government institutions allow Public Relations Practitioners to be a part of the management meetings. This hinders the public relations practitioner from having first-hand information needed to address any situation as a matter of urgency.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework of the study. It examines the key arguments and contentions that have emerged around structuration scholarship. It draws on Anthony Giddens and scholars such as John Parker (2010), Richard Whittington (2010) and Mukunda Lamsal (2012), who have discussed the concept of structuration. The section drew out and discussed the concepts that provided a basis for understanding participants' views on their experience in how 'structure' (rules and resources) either assists or impedes their ability to manage various social media platforms in State-owned Enterprises.

2.5.1 Defining Theory

The structuration theory was selected to guide the study and help understand the views generated from participants in line with the study's objectives. A theory usually emerges from a long process of research where empirical data is used to make assertions based on a deductive and inductive analysis of the data (Kivunja, 2018). In defining the concept of a theory, Kerlinger & Lee (1999, p. 11) state that:

a theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of a phenomenon by specifying relations among variables, to explain and predict the phenomena.

Concurring with the above assertion, Sunday (2008, p. 3) confirms that "a theory allows the researcher to make links between the abstract and the concrete; the theoretical and the empirical; thought statements and observational statements". A theory thus provides a framework for observation and understanding, which ultimately shapes how we understand any phenomena under investigation.

2.5.2 Structuration Theory

The origins of the structuration theory can be traced back to Anthony Giddens, a sociologist who focused on how the structures that humans find themselves in are determined for them and vice-versa. According to Lamsal (2012), the development of the structuration theory by Giddens was a response to claims by post-structuralism and volunteerism. Post-structuralism maintains that the structures that humans find themselves in are determined for them, while volunteerism suggests

that humans are completely free to create their lived environment (Lamsal, 2012). Whittington (2010, p. 145) states that “the theory was specifically developed in a series of books that began with Giddens’s *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976), continued through his *Central Problems of Social Theory* (1979) and culminated in the most comprehensive and systematic statement, in which he outlined his theory of structuration: *The Constitution of Society* (1984)”.

According to Ma (2014, p. 2), “central to the theory of structuration is the concept of “structure.” For Giddens, structure is a virtual order; structure does not have a physical existence. Rather, it is manifested in and through routinised activities involving the applications of rules and the manipulations of resources”. According to Giddens (1984), structure consists of rules and resources or sets of transformations relations organised as properties of social systems. These systems are reproduced relations between actors or collectives, organised as regular social practice. McPhee, Poole, & Iverson (2006) elaborate that a rule is any principle or routine that can guide activity while resources are anything else that facilitates activities, namely, material (budget, tools) or nonmaterial (knowledge, traditions) items. The theory also focuses on the connection between structure and agency. Lamsal (2012, p. 113) upholds that:

structure and agency cannot be separated; they are connected in what Giddens termed the ‘duality of structure’. Human actors are the elements that enable the creation of our society’s structure using invented values, norms or are reinforced through social acceptance. However, at the same time, people are constrained by our social structure.

Lamsal (2012, p. 113) explains that “the ‘duality of structure’ involves the identification of the relationship between the individual and the social forces that act upon it”. It can be viewed in terms of how people’s actions affect structures, affecting future actions (Folger, 2015). In other words, structure influences and is influenced by the unintentional consequences of people’s actions and decisions. In the case of Public Relation Practitioners, they are certain rules they need to follow. These rules could be what and how to communicate on social media platforms. Equally, the policies that they need to follow when seeking information within the organisation could be seen as pre-determined rules. Additionally, the available resources influence their ability to respond to queries that might arise on social media. Due to their understanding and utilisation of the rules within their organisations and access to resources, certain structures influence how they behave.

Building on the structuration theory, Lamsal (2012, p. 114) advances that “there are three basic structures that create the rules for each person. These are signification, domination, and legitimation”, which are explained below:

- The first type of structure is **signification** which produces meaning through organised webs of language (semantic codes, interpretive schemes, and discursive practices).
- The second dimension of his stratification model, **legitimation**, produces a moral order via naturalisation of societal norms, values, and standards; and
- The final element, **domination**, focuses on the production of (and exercise of) power, originating from the control of resources.

Therefore, organisational structures are more than organograms, but are an interplay of rules and resources which can either facilitate or inhibit the operations of Public Relations Practitioners. For instance, when it comes to signification, events on social media can be interpreted differently by various actors within the organisation. This, therefore, determines their actions. This can then be influenced by whether the event is legitimised - which would look at what should happen or how things need to be responded to. Lastly, domination determines what means or power the practitioner has in responding to these events. Through each of these processes, structures are created that influence the ability of the practitioner to address the events on social media. Figure 1 highlights this recursive relationship.

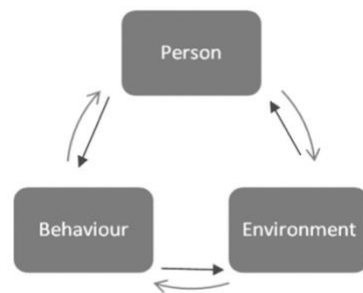


Figure 1: Triadic relationship among agency/person, environment, and behaviour/outcomes

Oppong (2014, p. 113) demonstrates the recursive relationships among person (agency), environment (structure), and behaviour (outcome). These recursive relationships suggest that people create the environment (structures), which in turn shape the person: it is also expected that both the person and the structures will influence the behaviour.

Gibbs (2013) upholds this by stating that the structuration theory offers perspectives on human behaviour based on a synthesis of structure and agency. Additionally, Pozzebon (2008) advances that the structuration theory observes that each person has knowledgeability, which can be viewed as the competence of agents. Giddens holds that all actors are socially competent, with the core idea being reflexivity: The capacity of humans to be reflexive—to think about what their situation-entails and the ability to change it.

Therefore, the structuration theory is appropriate for the study, which sought to examine the effect of organisational structure (rules and resources) on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms within a particular context. In this case, it looked at selected State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia.

2.5.3 Limitations of Structuration Theory

According to Kort & Gharbi (2013), the structuration theory has limitations, one of which focuses on the relationship between the structural dimension and the agency. Kort & Gabbi have argued that this relationship is not thoroughly developed because much emphasis was given on agency rather than on structure. Moreover, Pozzebon and Pinsonneault (2005) assert that Giddens's concepts' applicability is not without difficulties because of two main challenges.

- *Firstly, the structuration theory is deemed complicated and has many varying aspects that can operate at an elevated level of thought.*
- *Secondly, structuration theory is not easily coupled to any specific research method or methodological approach, and it is difficult to apply empirically.*

These are some of the limitations associated with the structuration theory. Regrettably, Frey (1994), as cited by David (2018, p. 26), further contends that “another limitation that can be observed from the structuration theory is that it has not provided a way of predicting which circumstances will result in the development of structures. This is because structures are both system producers and the outcome of systems; it is difficult to research structuration in small groups. Lastly, it is often difficult to pinpoint which structural changes occurred and when examining group interaction on a day-to-day basis”.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on the history of public relations and social media. It also focused on the uses of social media by PRPs, and highlighted challenges associated with using social media among PRPs. Anthony Giddens structuration theory was discussed to show its relevance in understanding the use and management of social media platforms by PRPs in selected commercial SOEs.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study. The study's main purpose was to understand Public Relations Practitioners' experiences with using and managing social media platforms in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia. The study focused on the following sub-objectives:

- To explore the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia using social media;
- To assess how "rules" in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia influence Public Relations Practitioners use of various social media platforms; and
- To assess how "resources" in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia inform Public Relations Practitioners use of social media.

The chapter, therefore, describes the research design, population, and sampling as well as the approach to data collection and analysis. The procedures used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected and the study's findings are also discussed. The chapter also discusses efforts undertaken to ensure that the study adheres to all ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design, Paradigm, and Approach

Researchers need to identify a structure or design that they will use in conducting their research. According to Akhtar (2016, p. 68), "a research design can be considered as the structure of research or as the "glue" that holds all the elements in a research project together. In short, it is a plan of the proposed research work". Jilcha Sileyew (2019) adds that research design allows for a study to have a relevant framework which a researcher can follow. Since the study sought to understand the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in using and managing social media platforms from a structuralist perspective, a phenomenological research design was employed. Shudak (2018) maintains that phenomenology is rooted in the lived experiences of participants in order to understand the phenomena under investigation. By using the phenomenological research design,

the study obtained Public Relations Practitioners' perspectives on their experience with using and managing social media platforms in SOEs.

Dammak (2015, p.5) explains that the "phenomenology design is usually located within the interpretivism paradigm, which considers reality as being multi-layered and complex". Khan (2014) observes that a paradigm is a structure or a set of suppositions and ideas that provide a pathway to see what the world looks like when its scientific aspect is related to its assumptions. Rehman & Alharthi (2016, p. 51) further elaborates that "a paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about 1) ontology, 2) epistemology, 3) methodology and 4) methods. In other words, it helps a researcher understand the reality of the world and how to study it". There are different research paradigms, and the interpretivism paradigm informs this study. Rehman & Alharthi (2016, p. 55) expound that "interpretivism rejects the notion that a single, verifiable reality exists independent of our senses". The paradigm further assumes a subjectivist epistemology which believes that the researcher will make meaning about their data through interactions with participants (Kivunja, 2018). In terms of values, interpretivism believes that researchers can never separate their values and beliefs from how a study is conducted, such as how data is collected, interpreted and analysed (Ryan, 2018). Interpretivists believe that people are creative and can actively construct their social reality. Thus, reality must be understood through the eyes of the participants. Interpretivism allowed this study to employ methods that allowed for the uncovering and in-depth understanding of Public Relations Practitioners experiences with using and managing social media platforms in SOEs.

In line with the assumptions of interpretivism, this study used the qualitative research method as an approach for data collection. Qualitative methods are useful when people's subjective experiences, meaning-making processes, and the need for acquiring a depth of understanding is required (Leavy, 2017). Through the qualitative approach, the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in managing social media platforms were explored. Creswell (2009, p. 4) states that "qualitative research can be viewed as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". The use of a qualitative approach was relevant in this study to better understand the phenomenon under investigation from the perspective of those experiencing it (Braun & Clarke 2006 cited in Munyuki, 2015). Interviewing was chosen as an appropriate tool for data collection. Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin (2009, p. 310) explain that "interviews permit the researcher to probe and explore hidden meanings for a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation".

3.2. Population, Sampling Technique and Procedure

In defining a population, Sa'id and Madugu (2015, p. 50) explain that "a population is a theoretically specified aggregation of survey elements. Elements and subjects refer to those individual items or variables that make up the population. They may be observed and or physically counted". According to Majid (2018, p. 3), the "population of interest is the study's target population". Hence Leavy (2017, p. 109) believes that research subjects or respondents should be identified and recruited by one's research purpose and hypothesis or research questions. This study's population consisted of Public Relations Practitioners in commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia, who are at the forefront of managing social media platforms for their organisations. Currently, there are 22 commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia. Since it may not always be possible to involve the entire population in a single study, a representative sample was selected to participate in this study. Majid (2018, p. 3) "backs this notion by pointing out that sampling is an important tool for research studies because the population of interest usually consists of too many individuals for any research project to include as participants". Marshall (1996, p. 522) "reinforces that sampling is an important step in any research project since it is rarely practical, efficient or ethical to study whole populations".

The purposive sampling technique was employed for this study. Taherdoost (2016, p. 24) "emphasises that purposive or judgmental sampling is a strategy in which particular settings, persons or events are selected deliberately to provide relevant information that cannot be obtained from other choices". Bhardwaj (2019) points out that the advantages of using this technique are that the researcher can produce desired results due to their ability to communicate directly to the audience. In addition, Marshall (1996, p. 523) states that "through purposive sampling, the "researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question". This technique assisted in selecting Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprise in Windhoek and who used social media for public relations purposes.

In terms of sample size in qualitative research, scholars (see Rahman, 2016; Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017) suggest that qualitative and arts-based approaches favour smaller sample sizes though there are no fixed rules for sample sizes. Of the 22 commercial SOEs, 16 were eligible to participate in the study. This means that within the 16 SOEs, some PRPs were using and managing social media platforms. From the 16, a total of nine Public Relations Practitioners participated in the study. The actual number of interviews was influenced by the availability of participants and the

principle of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when conducting further interviews beyond a certain point will not make a difference in the collected data. According to Faulkner & Trotter (2017, p. 1), “data saturation can be viewed as the point when no new information can be discovered, and this redundancy signals to researchers that data collection may cease”.

It is, therefore, important to note that failure to reach data saturation impacts the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity. Hence data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study when obtaining additional information attained and when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For this, after the ninth interview was done, saturation level had reached, and any further interviews would not provide any new information.

Table 3 below provides the characteristics of the participants. The participants had varying levels of experience as Public Relations Practitioners and the usage of social media for organisational communication. There were five females out of the nine, each having an Honours degree in Communications and two having a Master’s degree. Four males had an Honours degree in Communications, and one had a Master’s degree. All the participants were above 31 years of age, and two had between one to five years of experience. Other participants had more than six years of experience in the field.

Table 2: Participants Demographics (2021)

Code	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Years of Experience	Position
PR 1, 2021	Female	31 – 40	Honours degree	1 – 5	Communications Officer
PR 2, 2021	Female	31 – 40	Honours degree	1 – 5	Communications & Public Relations Assistant
PR 3, 2021	Female	31 – 40	Honours degree	6 – 10	Public Relations Officer
PR 4, 2021	Male	31 – 40	Honours degree	11+	Communications & Marketing Officer
PR 5, 2021	Male	31 – 40	Honours degree	6 – 10	Social Media

					Practitioner
PR 6, 2021	Female	31 – 40	Master’s degree	11+	Communications Officer
PR 7, 2021	Male	31 – 40	Honours degree	11+	Manager: Communications
PR 8, 2021	Male	41 - 49	Master’s degree	11+	Marketing Officer
PR 9, 2021	Female	31 – 40	Master’s degree	1 – 5	External Communications Officer

3.3 Data Collection Technique and Procedure

To collect data on Public Relations Practitioners’ experiences with using and managing social media platforms in commercial State-owned Enterprises, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Boyce & Neale (2006, p. 3) state “that face-to-face interviews are useful when a researcher wants to gather more information about a particular matter in their context as they ensure that there is no significant time delay between questions and answers and the interviewer and interviewee can directly react to what the other says or does”.

Structured interviews were used to gain much-needed insight into the lived experiences of the Public Relations Practitioners. Each interview had structured questions that were posed to each Public Relations Practitioner. All participants had the opportunity to seek clarity if the questions were not clear enough to express their views on them fully. Except for one of the Public Relations Practitioners, each interview was conducted at their respective offices. This was done to ensure that they were comfortable and at ease to answer the interview questions. The researcher provided each participant with an overview of the research, and each interview lasted 30 minutes long. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Using a recorder has the advantage that the interview report is more accurate than writing out notes. For this study, a smartphone with an internal recorder application was used to record the interviews, after which they were saved on voice memos. Questions posed to the participants explored the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia using social media. They also assessed how “rules” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia influence Public Relations Practitioners use of various social media platforms. Equally, the

questions looked at how “resources” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia inform Public Relations Practitioners use of social media.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique and Procedure

To provide meaning and understanding to the data that was collected, the study used deductive thematic analysis. According to Hyde (2000), deductive thematic analysis can be viewed as a testing process that commences with an established theory or generalisation and seeks to see if the theory applies to specific instances. Focusing on the meaning of the dataset, thematic analysis allows the researcher to draw meaning from the participants’ collective/shared experiences. In doing so, it can find the commonality of particular topics through the manner they are shared. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that there are six stages to conduct a thematic analysis which are described as follows:

1. Familiarise yourself with your data – in this stage; the researcher familiarises themselves with their data;
2. Assign preliminary codes to your data to describe the content – in this stage, the researcher assigns codes to their dataset. Codes are words or phrases used to describe participant views;
3. Search for patterns or themes in your codes across the different interviews – in this phase; the researcher identifies themes that provide a broader understanding of the dataset;
4. Review themes – in this stage, the researcher refines the themes through re-reading the extracts that they would have derived from the codes;
5. Define and name themes – in this stage, the researcher names and describes themes that have emerged through coding and;
6. Produce your report – in this stage; the researcher presents and discusses their findings.

Following the recommendations by Braun and Clarke (2006) on thematic analysis, the researcher began the process by transcribing interview recordings to a written format. Each participant was assigned a code, for instance, PR 1, 2021. Transcribing the recordings was a necessary step to make the process of coding feasible. After transcribing, the transcripts were read and re-read to have a better understanding of participants’ views. After reading the transcripts, the coding process began. The coding process was done manually, and numerous codes were generated in the initial coding process. The second phase of coding involved reviewing the initial codes to identify emerging

themes. After reviewing the themes that emerged from the second coding phase, the researcher then identified three main themes, which were informed by theory and the study objectives. Within each theme, some sub-themes helped explain participants' views. These themes were: experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in State-owned Enterprises in using social media platforms, rules (policies) and the use of social media among Public Relations Practitioners and resources and the use of social media among Public Relations Practitioners. Participants' views were used to support the identified themes and sub-themes.

3.5 Trustworthiness

According to Daymon and Holloway (2011), the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is evaluated by looking at its constituencies comprising credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Taylor and Medina (2013, p. 4 - 5) assert that **credibility** looks at whether the researcher undertook prolonged immersion in the field, checked their interpretations with their informants, and displayed a process of learning? **Dependability** seeks to determine if the researcher engaged in open-ended or emergent inquiry? **Confirmability** aims to verify if others can confirm the data. **Transferability** asks if there is sufficient rich description for the reader to compare their social context with the social setting of the research?

To ensure that the study has credibility, the researcher interviewed and recorded each participant's views verbatim, which, together with the literature and theory-informed the research. Regarding dependability, the process was achieved by listening, reading, and repeating these actions numerous times. Confirmability was achieved by having the researcher and the supervisor go through the same data to ensure trustworthiness. Finally, transferability was reached by describing the processes that informed how the study was done and the participants that were part of it.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

It is important to note that before data was collected, permission was sought from the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) Ethical Committee. According to Arik, Kaptein, & Karssing (2018), ethical committees improve and safeguard ethical practice in research. Permission was sought and granted by participating organisations in this study. Each of the organisations either sent a letter or an email granting the researcher the required permission to conduct the study with their employees.

All ethical guidelines, as stipulated in the NUST's ethical clearance certificate, were adhered to. From an ethical perspective, the researcher protected all the information gathered during the face-to-face interviews. Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin (2009, p. 312) state "that protection of participants rights is a fundamental aspect of conducting an interview, and the issues of informed consent and anonymity and confidentiality are of paramount importance". To ensure informed consent, participants were given a full explanation of the nature of the research and the interview format. Hycner (1985) advises that all participants should be informed from the onset of the research and that their involvement should be voluntary and that they can withdraw at any point, without penalty. Participants were informed of the confidentiality of the information they shared; and that they were not to be charged to partake in the research. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), as cited by Pillay (2014 p. 199), "to maintain confidentiality in any study means that no participant will be mentioned by name. In this case, a code was assigned as a means of identifying participants. All ethical standards were upheld to ensure the integrity of the research".

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research design employed, the population and sampling techniques, and methods used to collect and analyse data. Additionally, the ethical guidelines that were considered in the study were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4. Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings of this study. The focus of the study was to examine the effect of organisational structure (rules and resources) on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms in selected State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia. The findings are presented through sub-themes that were informed by the three sub-objectives of the study. Each theme is discussed following the sequence of objectives from chapter one. Lastly, to maintain the anonymity of the participants, each participant was assigned a code starting from PR 1 – PR 9, 2021.

4.1 Experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in State-owned Enterprises in using Social Media Platforms

The experience of Public Relations Practitioners with the use of social media platforms in State-owned Enterprises is discussed. Other sub-themes, namely dialogic approach to communication, types of social media platforms used by Public Relations Practitioners, uses of social media platforms by Public Relations Practitioners and challenges of using social media for public relations purposes, are also discussed.

4.1.1 Dialogic Approach to Communication

Social media within State-owned Enterprises has transformed public relations in many ways. One fundamental shift has been the dialogic approach to communication that social media offers compared to traditional media, which supports a monologue method of communication. According to Matthews (2010), social media has required Public Relations Practitioners to embrace dialogue when communicating with their stakeholders. Matthews (2010) argues that social media has forced corporate communications to shift to a dialogue that allows all stakeholders to have power over the message. The findings of this study align with the observations reflected above. PR 2, 2021 explains:

The great thing about social media, in my opinion, is the fact that you have direct access and direct communication with your stakeholders and your followers (PR 2, 2021).

Furthermore, participant PR 5, 2021, opines:

I think the fact with the traditional media platforms is that you do not have an interactive opportunity. It is just one way you send out the information. People receive this, but here we are able to also get the people's views and in terms of what can I say - constructive criticism. We are able to hear what their views are so that it also enables us to change where we can.

This narrative emphasises that with traditional media, there is no interactive opportunity, unlike with social media. Inya (2017) also highlights that the power over the message is no longer the exclusive preserve of an organisation; the various publics also enjoy equal power to initiate dialogue. This requires Public Relations Practitioners to ensure that they can converse easily on these platforms. For some participants, the two-way communication facilitated by social media platforms has contributed towards improved service. Participant PR8, 2021, comments:

(With social media) we are able to actually identify now where the problem is and then with that information, we communicate with our Executive Committee (EXCO) and tell them that this is the problem that we are having, and we use that information to tackle whatever. Like for instance, now we are doing a customer contact centre upgrade. We are upgrading the whole system and that was because our customers complained that they could not reach us.

To further explain the shift in the approach to communication participants maintain:

What happened is that previously we used to write media releases and that's it. Send it to them (media organisations) and then they put it in the newspaper if they want it. At times you know you will have to pay for that. (With) social media, it gets a wider reach than newspapers because newspapers in as much as we have a big print run not everyone gets them, but with social media, if you put it there, someone will screenshot it and share it on WhatsApp (PR 6, 2021).

The narrative above stresses that unlike in the past, where the onus was on a media house to either publicise or not publicise media releases, social media has presented them (PRPs) with another channel to be able to publish their messages in such a manner that a layperson can understand it. According to Waters, Tindall, & Morton (2010), an increasing number of practitioners acknowledge that traditional media relations was losing its dominance, and there was a need for public relations

scholars and educators to explore the emerging new era of media relations. Wright & Hinson (2014) point out that new media has “changed the rules of the game in every part” of strategic communication.

4.1.2 Types of Social Media Platforms used by Public Relations Practitioners

Research done by Manavik et al. (2015) indicates that Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have been extensively used by Public Relations Practitioners for various purposes. The findings of this study are consistent with observations made by other studies on the use of social media among Public Relations Practitioners. The participants' views confirm that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and in some cases, Instagram and TikTok accounts have been used as ways of communicating with the public. Participants comment:

So, we have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok and Google or YouTube and a little bit of Google plus some few things here and there. Facebook is the biggest one at the moment. Twitter is also one of those platforms that we are on because Twitter makes it easy to get messages across. We have Instagram, we use it more for the imagery too (PR 5, 2021). The social media platforms that we are currently making use of within the set-up is Facebook, and then we have LinkedIn... (PR 7, 2021).

We are on Facebook, we are on Twitter, we are on Instagram and LinkedIn. LinkedIn is where we put on our information... that needs to do with for instance, we just recently put on information regarding the status of the recruitment for the applications (PR 8, 2021).

The views above describe social media platforms that PRPs are using to communicate with various stakeholders. The increasing use of social media platforms for communication purposes highlights that, as argued by DiStaso & Bortree (2014) and Erasmus (2012), social media has become very integral in organisational communication and is critical for companies in building connections with the public. The use of these social media platforms by various organisations has been attributed to, among other reasons, their popularity and the sheer volume of people that use them. Some participants explain:

Most obviously Facebook, because for the known reason that it reaches a larger audience (PR1, 2021).

..., it's obviously always about volume, you cannot really go for a social media platform that has a limited amount of followers so it will be the usual suspects which is Facebook, Instagram, we recently joined Twitter (PR3, 2021).

Kemp (2021) states that there were approximately 800 000 social media users in Namibia in January 2021, translating to 31.2 per cent of the country's total population. This confirms the high volume of people using social media platforms. Research also maintains that Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, LinkedIn, and Twitter have been used by various organisations owing to their popularity (see Brenner (2018); DiStaso & Bortree (2014). Baruah (2012) emphasises that the evolution of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has been extensively used for communication.

4.1.3 Uses of Social Media Platforms by Public Relations Practitioners

The use of social media by Public Relations Practitioners has increased dramatically over the years. Various scholars have observed that social media has become an essential tool for Public Relations Practitioners (see Culnan et al. 2010; Krishan, 2015). Public Relations Practitioners have used social media platforms for various purposes. As evidenced in the findings of this study, social media has been used by participating Public Relations Practitioners to engage with different publics for specific reasons. One participant explains:

We are using Twitter ... to target the business travellers as well... (PR 4, 2021)

Similarly participant PR1, 2021, opines that they use Twitter because of its business orientated nature.

... We use Twitter as well because we obviously trying to keep up with the times and Twitter is more business orientated...

Other participants have indicated that they use social media to reach international clients and lure critical skills. For instance PR 2, 2021, states:

I think based on the research we did on the different platforms, I think those (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn) are the ones that would actually draw more traffic towards our company in terms of getting more clients internationally and also locally.

PR 7, 2021 maintains that:

... we are in a specialised field, and we are in the healthcare sector and apart from the medical technologies that you get, you have got specialised skills in terms of the pathologist. But they are specialising so sometimes these are expatriates that we want. So, we make use of LinkedIn to lure some of these guys (PR 7, 2021).

For other participants, social media platforms are used for advertising purposes. PR2, 2021, comments that *“if we are advertising something, probably some success stories we would probably put it on all our social media ...”* Similarly, PR 3, 2021, explains:

... so, we came up with a campaign, so with this campaign we thought that this would be a fantastic opportunity to actually share (on social media), you know because the industry in general is known as an opaque industry.

Baruah (2012) supports the above narratives, stating that one of the most important advantages of using social media is the online sharing of knowledge and information among diverse groups. Moreno et al. (2015) corroborate this by affirming that social media has altered the relations between organisations and their stakeholders due to its ability to disseminate content, provide interactivity, and foster lasting relationships.

Participants' views confirm the usage and importance of social media in supporting communication within organisations. Furthermore, the findings highlight some factors considered in selecting social media platforms for specific organisational communication. Manavik et al. (2015) contend that social media helps corporate communication professionals build and maintain relationships with their publics. This assertion explains the increase in the use of social media platforms by Public Relations Practitioners to benefit their organisations.

4.1.4 Challenges of using Social Media Platforms for Public Relations Purposes

According to Almfleah (2017) and Sun et al. (2002), not all Public Relations Practitioners have found the shift brought by using social media easy to manage. This is compounded by the multitude of evolving platforms organisations need to adapt to, to serve their stakeholders better (DiStaso &

Bortree, 2014). Some of the challenges experienced by Public Relations Practitioners relate to the delays in disseminating crucial information to participants. One participant explains:

We as a PR division have a social media calendar and we share that; we share the schedule with each of our key departments so they can brief us on what they want to put out there. Sometimes you'd find an issue whereby the key departments take longer than the intended time (PR 2, 2021).

Clāra (2020) emphasises the need for organisations to ensure that their social media pages are kept up to date. Jario (2019) contends that public relations is often seen as a nice to have and not an essential part of the organisation. This arguably explains the delays in information sharing by some organisations. The delay in sharing information leads to information overload and the inability of organisations to communicate effectively with their target audience. Regarding the impact of the delay, PR2, 2021 comments:

It (messages) then overlaps with what was on the social media calendar, and we end up posting too many things at the same time and it does not really reach the specific audience we want.

Apart from the delays in providing information on social media platforms, some participants reflected on challenges associated with managing feedback from the different publics. Some participants expressed that:

Social media...has its disadvantages like I said, because you know the communication, sometimes the feedback that you get is not what you were hoping to get... (PR 3, 2021).

We get a lot of negative responses from the customers and then we also try to remove those negative responses by not responding to them on social media (PR 8, 2021).

Challenges of managing social media responses are reflected in the narrative by PR 9, 2021:

The main way for me, that I have found, it is always wiser to read between the lines, number one, but number two also to take the conversation offline. Because one of the things that's interesting about social media is that people are much stronger and much more vocal on

social media platforms. But when you take it offline and you give them a call, it is a totally different conversation. A totally different tone... (PR 9, 2021).

The narratives above reflect the shift that has occurred in the communication landscape hence Clāra (2020) talks of how social media now limits organisations' ability to control what the public says and the pace at which negative news can spread. A study performed by Jegede & Karaduman (2020) confirms that most customers prefer using social media to complain though they found that complaints tend to take a long duration before they are attended to, and some companies do not accept social media complaints from their customers. Thus for Fotis (2015), social media can enable people to express and share ideas, thoughts, and opinions with others, thus enabling people to connect.

Some participants have alluded to unrealistic expectations when it comes to managing social media platforms. PR 3, 2021 explains:

Well, I think the misconception in a sense is that once you have, you know a PR practitioner, communication practitioner that you are able to handle everything and that that puts a lot of pressure on the person. So the challenges for me in a sense is having to run the social media platform as comprehensively as I possibly can while still looking after and taking care of all the other jobs you know, responsibilities that I carry so I think it's in a sense that the lack of time and the fact that it's quite a taxing part of a person's job is looking after your social media platforms (PR 3, 2021).

Current literature (see Lee, 2013; Moreno et al., 2015) does confirm that Public Relations Practitioners are not all well equipped to use social media for their work. Aula & Laaksonen (2010) contends that some companies have struggled to make use of social media effectively, while research conducted by Çömlekçi & Güney (2016) indicates that organisations are looking at better ways of utilising social media.

These findings highlight the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in managing social media to engage with their external audience. The advancement in technology has played a significant role, as highlighted by studies done by Duhē (2007) and Uzunoğlu & Onat (2012). This shift has not been easy for all institutions, especially for government institutions, as highlighted by a study done by Schein et al. (2010). Equally, the multiple layers of policy and processes do not always address the

public's immediate needs for current information. In the next section, the rules (policies) that guide social media usage by PRPs will be discussed.

4.2 Rules (policies) and the use of Social Media among Public Relations Practitioners

According to Ma (2014), structure is at the centre of the structuration theory. For Anthony Giddens, structure is not a physical one, but a virtual order manifested in and through routinised activities involving the applications of rules and the manipulations of resources. In this section, rules in the context of the structuration theory will be the focus in order to derive a better understanding of how they affect the work of PRPs in SOEs.

McPhee et al. (2006) define rules as any principle or routine that can guide activity, while Lamsal (2012, p. 113) believes that "rules can restrict or facilitate action". Within these organisations, Public Relations Practitioners need to follow certain rules, which might be informed by policies that the organisation has or does not have. The use of social media policies, which in this case will be referred to as rules, was mentioned by many participants. For instance, PR 2, 2021 mentions:

We have a communication policy that also entails on what to post on social media. When we didn't have a manager in place, we used to engage the office of the MD because sometimes he's a bit sensitive on what we post there, so he also needs to be involved in terms of final approval per se, so the policy does also make provision for us, there's a procedure of approval in the policy. I don't have the authority to post something without consulting my supervisor.

By creating these rules (restriction on actions), both the person and the structures will influence the behaviour within the organisation (Oppong, 2014). El-Taliawi (2018) points out that for government to harness the potential of social media use, a well-designed policy must be in place. Through the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, the Namibian Government drafted a Social Media Use Policy and Implementation Plan intending to direct how social media is used within various government departments (Tweya, 2016).

PR 4 (2021) views spoke to the importance of the management taking ownership of the social media policy. He emphasised that the policy is supposed to be a living document where people are aware

of it. Otherwise, according to Schein et al. (2010), the multiple layers of policy and processes that are there might not address the public's current needs of requiring information instantaneously.

Participants state that:

Yes, we do have a policy that I drafted last year that we implemented last year as well. It's a document, but I think it's more important because a document is just the document. Until you have read it, until it becomes a part of you, you internalise it, and you know what I should do when and what and so again it goes back to encouraging my managers to read this policy for them to understand and probably to initiate the messages that we can communicate, because if they don't understand that policy then they would not probably come forth with ideas on how we should communicate on social media (PR 4, 2021).

PR 7 (2021) stated that their policy is not static since it evolves with the changes that occur within the social media space.

So, we do have a social media policy that guides us into how we and sometimes that is also not a static policy. With time, if we see the social media space, or technologically changing fast, we scan the environment and check what we need to adapt, cut, and change and so on. So that's very important (PR 7, 2021).

PR 9 (2021) supported PR 7 (2021) views on the need to continuously adapt one's policy according to the changes occurring within the social media environment. For PR 9, their policy was revised to better deal with the structure within the organisation. PR9 (2021) explains:

We do have a social media policy that I think was developed a few years back and then amended last year if I am not wrong. I think it still needs to be adopted by us, I'm not so sure but I just know the policy was developed and was worked on. So the policy actually looks at who should do what? What are the procedures? Who's doing what? Are there procedures and what are the dos and don'ts, and then I think what has been interesting, especially with the policy, is that it's not just about the social media practitioner, it encompasses everybody that is in the company about when and how they should conduct themselves, for example, one of the things I remember was. Even as an employee when you see this certain conversation about the company, in particular. It's not the wisest thing for you to then jump in and start saying things in the same because it could backfire on you (PR 9, 2021).

For PR 1 (2021), the policy also highlights the distinct roles of each individual and what they can post. Additionally, the policy seeks to assist employees in knowing how to engage on social media to avoid situations where what is posted can have negative consequences. According to theory, this would demonstrate the recursive relationships among person (agency), environment (structure), and behaviour (outcome). The availability of policy informs employees how they should behave (Oppong, 2014). Therefore, the behaviour of the employees will influence the structure to change as they interact with each other.

While some participants alluded to not having specific policies, they referred to the importance of guidelines to better manage social media platforms. For instance, PR 3 and 5 mentioned that:

Well, at the moment we are in the beginning stages of actually drafting something because I think it's important to obviously have guidelines into to know exactly how things need to be done, etc. So we're in the process of drafting this social media policy at the moment (PR 3, 2021).

No, we don't have a policy in place, but what we do is we have what we put like our communication policy. We think that there's a content or there's a section in that, that caters for that, but we do have guidelines for staff members, on the conduct on social media (PR 5, 2021).

Notwithstanding that some State-owned Enterprises have policies, an analysis of the narratives of PR 3, 5 and 8 (2021) highlights that even though they do not have policies in place, in their view, the guidelines assist them in managing their social media platforms. It is therefore interesting that in a study done by Macnamara (2011), they found that more than 65 per cent of private and public sector organisations in Austria had no specific policies or guidelines about social media use by employees, while 23 per cent of organisations have no social media policy or guidelines for employees at all. A study done by El-Taliawi (2018) highlights that a well-designed policy must be in place to harness the potential of social media use.

In the case of Namibia, it is important to note that in certain sections, social media has been embraced to support government communication (IPPR, 2017). The findings show that rules in SOEs play an important role in the management of social media platforms by PRPs. This is because rules

guide PRPs conduct on these platforms. Therefore, it is important that they are well defined and known throughout the organisation to make it easier for the PRP to function effectively on these communication platforms.

4.3 Resources and the use of Social Media among Public Relations Practitioners

Lamsal (2012) explains that structuration is influenced by what is termed as the duality of structure which is the relationship that occurs between the individual and the social forces that act upon it. In this case, Public Relations Practitioners work within State-owned Enterprises, which are organisations where the state has significant control through full, majority, or significant minority ownership. At the same time, the resources that are either at their disposal or not play a role in responding to queries that emerge from social media platforms. This section presents findings on the effect of resources on Public Relations Practitioners' ability to manage social media platforms. The theory states that resources can be described as anything that facilitates activities, namely, material (budget, tools) or non-material (knowledge) (McPhee et al. 2006).

Participant PR 4 (2021) highlighted that senior management's absence on social media platforms makes it difficult for them to appreciate how various platforms work, in the process limiting the number of resources allocated for social media use. Equally, Mutambo (2014) states that few government institutions allow Public Relations Practitioners to be part of the management meetings, which hinders the Public Relations Practitioner ability to receive relevant information required to address any situation through various communication channels. One participant comment:

I have been encouraging my seniors to really join these platforms because if you are part of these platforms that is the only way you can understand. Why am I asking you to please give me feedback on something at a certain time because on social media it's about time. And if we respond 3-4 days later, then it's like so what? So, you know what I'm saying. We need to sort of direct the conversation and we can only do that with facts (PR 4, 2021).

PR 5 (2021) expresses the same sentiments as PR 4 (2021) in that people are not always supportive or see the urgency required in responding to requests from their department. The theory would explain this behaviour as the domination of a particular actor within the organisation exhibiting their power (Lamsal, 2012). PR5 (2021) explains:

But of course, we've got people that are resistant at times where you send out and say the media asked me for specific information or clarity on this please can you provide me the information by, let's say to a specific date? That person doesn't even acknowledge that they received your email, you make follow up. It's like yeah, I have other things to do (PR 5, 2021).

Structuration theory assumes that resources, which can be knowledge or tools that agents possess, can facilitate, or inhibit work. The positioning of public relations in the organogram of various organisations has been cited as another factor limiting the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to engage in communication activities with various publics effectively. Studies done by Jario (2014) and Mutambo (2014) indicate that public relations in Namibia is not seen as an essential role in most organisations and that few Public Relations Practitioners in government are within the senior management structures. David (2018) observes that in most Ministries, Public Relations Practitioners roles are not well defined. Some participants reflect on the importance of having the PR function at the management level:

... my manager sits on the EXCO, at EXCO level because everything that is discussed at that level, she has to know about it, and we then communicate. We have a very open, we are transparent. We want to communicate timelessly, and we want to communicate every little information to everybody, especially inhouse we owe our employees the right to know everything even before the media brings it out (PR 1, 2021).

Another participant highlights the challenges that exist when the Public Relations Practitioner is not within the management level:

... (we had) the PA to the MD give us a brief of what was discussed in EXCO and what PR needed to do. No, it wasn't effective because for me time was involved and if you take too long because there was EXCO today and you give us a brief or what was discussed two days thereafter. We've lost so much time in between being there and the interim. Whereas we now have someone from the department that sits there, in-real time. He comes back and we have a meeting, and we action it there and then (PR 2, 2021).

The correct placement of the PR function will provide resources (knowledge and information) (Giddens, 1984) critical for Public Relations Practitioners abilities to manage communication, more so social media communication platforms that require immediate feedback. As evidenced above,

structure influenced the rate at which communication was disseminated, and this influenced PRPs engagement with the public through different communication platforms.

The study's findings show that resources play a significant role in the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to execute their roles, especially in managing various social media platforms. Since resources are such an essential element in ensuring that Public Relations Practitioners do their work, they must be given the necessary resources to help them better serve the public.

4.4 Conclusion

The study found out that the most used social media networks by Public Relations Practitioners were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok. These platforms were chosen based on their popularity (amongst stakeholders) and purpose. The study also found that Public Relations Practitioners had varied experiences when it came to managing social media platforms, with some of the participants not fully providing the attention social media deserves. The study also identified two major challenges experienced by Public Relations Practitioners in managing social media platforms. These were challenges in handling negative comments and delayed feedback from various departments to respond to clients queries. The study's findings show that rules greatly influence the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media effectively. This is due to policies that define the manner that PRPs need to behave within SOEs. Regarding resources, the study found that social media management was easier in organisations where the PRP was in a managerial role and sitting with EXCO. However, in SOEs where this was not the case, there were challenges in getting the much-needed resources to manage social media platforms better.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Introduction

The study's main objective was to examine the influence of organisational structure on Public Relations Practitioners approach or ability to manage various social media platforms at specific State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia. To achieve the main objective of the study, sub-objectives were explored. These sub-objectives were: to explore the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia using social media, to assess how "rules" in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia influence Public Relations Practitioners use of various social media platforms, and to assess how "resources" in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia inform Public Relations Practitioners use of social media.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the study's conclusions and provide recommendations on how organisational structure (rules and resources) within State-owned Enterprises can assist Public Relations Practitioners in better managing social media platforms. It also provides suggestions for further research on aspects of public relations and social media in Namibia.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The summary of findings for this study are discussed based on the study's objectives. Thus, the following summary of findings are presented:

- **To explore the experiences of Public Relations Practitioners in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia using social media**

Most Public Relations Practitioners confirmed that social media had a significant impact on how they communicate with various publics. Social media provides an opportunity for dialogue with the public on multiple platforms, unlike traditional media, which does not offer the interactive aspect. The shift to a dialogic approach has also brought about some challenges for PRPs. Some of the challenges include PRPs limited capacity to respond to all communication on social media. For instance, PRPs lack the skills to address complaints posted on these platforms leading to delays in communication.

Furthermore, Public Relations Practitioners use social media to create awareness of the activities within their respective State-owned Enterprises. Based on the analysis of the participants' narratives, there is evidence of substantial social media usage in State-owned Enterprises. On this basis, DiStaso & Bortree (2014) and Erasmus (2012) have said that social media has become very integral in organisational communication. Baruah (2012) believes that social media has supported the online sharing of knowledge and information among diverse people. In addition, Moreno et al. (2015) maintain that social media has altered the relations between organisations and their stakeholders, given its ability to disseminate content and provide interactivity. The study thus found that Public Relations Practitioners in State-owned Enterprises use social media for public relations purposes.

- **To assess how “rules” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia influence Public Relations Practitioners use of various social media platforms**

The study found that rules referred to as the social media policy within SOEs play a role in managing social media. The findings showed that the rules were essential in avoiding fragmented communication taking place within the organisation. Similarly, some participants pointed out that the social media policy needs to become a 'living' document that management is aware of. Equally, the social media policy must evolve with the times. In SOEs where they were no policies, guidelines were used to set out what is expected by PRP in the management of social media platforms.

- **To assess how “resources” in selected commercial State-owned Enterprises in Namibia inform Public Relations Practitioners use of social media**

The data analysed showed that resources available to PRPs within State-owned Enterprises influence their effective management of various social media platforms. The position of the Public Relations Practitioner within the organisation and their access to these resources, as described by McPhee et al. (2006), equally influence how they use the various social media platforms for public relations purposes. David (2018) suggests that Public Relations Practitioners find it hard to fulfil their roles due to the structures within the public sector. This supports the findings of this research where certain State-owned Enterprises inhibit Public Relations Practitioners from sitting within the EXCO. This then hinders the PRP from having first-hand information to defend the institution, if necessary, on social media. Thus, the study found that social media management was quite effective in

organisations where the PRP sits on the EXCO. Whereas, in SOEs where this was not the case, there were delays in instantaneously responding to social media queries, which is one of the critical pillars of social media interaction.

5.2 Conclusion based on the Findings of the Study

The conclusions drawn from the findings are that there is significant use of social media in various State-owned Enterprises. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram emerged as the widely used social media networks for communication purposes. A shift to dialogue and challenges related to managing social media feedback described PRPs experiences using social media. Structure, which can also be understood as rules and resources, according to Giddens (1984), does influence the ability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage various social media platforms, especially in SOEs.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter, the study makes the following recommendations. The study recommends that State-owned Enterprises create enabling policies for social media use. Through these policies, Public Relations Practitioners will be guided on how to manage social media better. Additionally, the study recommends that any policy that is created should be communicated widely within the organisation. This will ensure that each individual understands the important role that social media plays in communication.

To ensure that State-owned Enterprises Executives better support Public Relations Practitioners, the study recommends that they periodically evaluate how the Public Relations Practitioner handles social media. Through this, the Executives will assess whether the PRP is receiving the necessary resources to execute their role. If this is not the case, necessary steps should be taken to address this shortfall. The study further recommends that training be provided in State-owned Enterprises where the Public Relations Practitioner is not well equipped to manage social media. This is because of the constant changes that occur on social media platforms, which will also provide PRPs with resources to use social media effectively.

Lastly, the study recommends that Public Relations Practitioners in State-Owned Enterprises be empowered to attend EXCO meetings to directly raise matters emanating from social media to the

respective EXCO members. This will also help the Public Relations Practitioners get first-hand information that might assist in managing various social media platforms.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The study mainly used self-reports from PRPs, which may have had biases and ultimately affected the findings. The study examined the effect of organisational structure on the capability of PRPs at State-owned Enterprises to manage social media platforms in Windhoek and only focused on commercial State-owned Enterprises, and thus these results cannot be used to generalise all State-owned Enterprises in Namibia.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the reviewed literature in Chapter two, there is limited literature on public relations and social media in developing countries such as Namibia. This research was limited to commercial State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek. Therefore, future research should look at all State-owned Enterprises in Namibia. Also, researchers can look at conducting comparative research between State-owned Enterprises and private sector companies to generate much deeper insights.

5.6 Conclusions

This chapter drew conclusions on the main findings in line with the study's objectives. It also provided recommendations regarding the effective use of social media by Public Relations Practitioners in organisations such as State-owned Enterprises.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Certificate

FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (F-REC)

DECISION: ETHICS APPROVAL

Ref: S030/2020
Student no.: 200922475

Issue Date: 11 August 2020

RESEARCH TOPIC

Title: Examining the effect of organisational structure on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms: A case of selected SOEs in Windhoek, Namibia

Researcher: Mufaro Nesongano
Tel: +264 61 285 71996 / +264 81 253 1450
E-mail: mufaro_n@yahoo.com

Supervisor: Dr Nkosinothando Mpofo
E-mail: nmpofu@nust.na

Dear Mr Nesongano,

The Faculty of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (F-REC) of the Namibia University of Science and Technology reviewed your application for the above-mentioned research. The research as set out in the application has been approved.

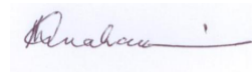
We would like to point out that you, as principal investigator, are obliged to:

- maintain the ethical integrity of your research,
- adhere to the Research policy and ethical guidelines of NUST, and
- remain within the scope of your research proposal and supporting evidence as submitted to the F-REC.

Should any aspect of your research change from the information as presented to the F-REC, which could have an effect on the possibility of harm to any research subject, you are under the obligation to report it immediately to your supervisor or F-REC as applicable in writing. Should there be any uncertainty in this regard, you have to consult with the F-REC.

We wish you success with your research, and trust that it will make a positive contribution to the quest for knowledge at NUST.

Sincerely,



Prof Rewai Makamani
Acting Chairperson: FREC / Associate Dean: Research
and Innovation
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7.2 Appendix 2: Research Instrument

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Research: Examining the effect of organisational structure on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms: A case of selected State-owned Enterprises in Windhoek, Namibia

Name of Principal Investigator: Mufaro Nesongano

Phone Number of Principal Investigator: +26481 253 1450

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Mufaro Nesongano is a student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) and is examining the effect of organisational structure on the capability of Public Relations Practitioners to manage social media platforms. The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher evaluate the impact the organisational structure plays in Public Relations Practitioners being able to manage social media platforms.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be contacted for a face-to-face interview or Zoom meeting with the researcher administering the questionnaire. The interview will take less than 30 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All questionnaires will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Only research personnel will have access to the data after the study is completed.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. Should you choose to participate in this study, you are also at liberty to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Mufaro Nesongano on +264 81 253 1450 or by email: mufaro_n@yahoo.com

CONSENT

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR TICK BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AFTER READING ALL OF THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND YOU UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION.

Tick to agree

Date

.....

SECTION A

1. Gender

Male		Female	
------	--	--------	--

2. Age

16 – 20		41 - 49	
21 - 30		50 - 60	
31 - 40		60 +	

3. Highest level of Education

Below Grade 12		Bachelors Degree	
Grade 12		Honours degree	
Certificate		Master’s degree	

4. Years of Experience

Less than 1 year		Between 6 -10 years	
Between 1 – 5 years		11 + years	

5. Job Position

.....

PR practitioners in selected State-owned Enterprise use social media for Public Relations purposes.

- I. Which social media platforms does your organisation make use of and why do you use these particular ones?
- II. How do you use the identified social media platforms for Public Relations purposes?
- III. What are the three main issues that get raised on your social media platforms?

SECTION C: To examine the experience of Public Relations Practitioners in SOEs with the use of Social Media.

- I. How has social media impacted your ability to communicate as a PRPs with your external audience?
- II. What are the key challenges that you face when communicating on social media?
- III. What are some of the differences you face between making use of social media to communicate and traditional media?
- IV. How do you handle a social media crisis as a practitioner?
- V. What can be improved to ensure your role as a Public Relations Practitioner is made easier when communicating on social media?
- VI. How do you deal with negative messages that are posted on your social media pages?

SECTION D - To assess how organisational structure of SOEs influences PR Practitioner's ability to manage various social media platforms.

- I. Which individuals are designated to communicate via social media in your organisation?
- II. Who usually determines what can or cannot be said on the social media platforms?

- III. What policy do you have in place that guides your interaction with members of the public on social media?

- IV. What support structure do you have to manage your social media platforms?
 - a. How has it impacted on your work as a Public Relations Practitioner?

- V. Are there any changes you would like to see effected on the structure to facilitate your work?
 - a. If yes, what are some of the changes you would like to see and why?

- VI. What role do you play in determining what can be or can't be posted in social media?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

7.3 Appendix 3: Participant Responses

PR 1

Researcher

Firstly, which social media platforms do you use and why are you on those particular platforms?

PR 1

Most obviously Facebook, because for the known reason that it reaches a larger audience, and it's actually more interactive than than most of the platforms that were available and then we use twitter as well because we obviously trying to keep up with the times and Twitter is more business orientated so we do use Twitter basically, the two main social media platforms. I can mention that we used and besides, obviously we have Meatco's website and that is where we are known and that's our home. We are an international company as well so we meet and interact with our people there.

Researcher

When you look at issues that stream from your social media platforms, what are the three main concerns that you pick up?

PR 1

OK, so basically, we have a very interesting audience. We have our target group which are the farmers one of our stakeholders and then we obviously we have a local brand which is the Meatma brand we sell to locals to feed the local basket in terms of our meat and stuff. So, it will be a thing of slow response as people don't feel like we are interacting with them that would be one issue I would say that people experience and then another issue in terms of, people don't understand the Meatco business you know what we put out there for a certain type of person that we think would understand, there's a lot of ambiguity in terms of what we communicate because we have certain jargon to the business. It's a certain way of communicating to try and talk to your specific audiences that we think would understand so that is maybe just also, another thing you need to be a little bit. Uhm? Should I say open to everybody in terms of communication needs to be for everybody? Don't think people know what you're trying to communicate already that perception is quite difficult to have, or actually for the audience is out there. I think those are the two main problems. I don't want to say there is a lot. We get a lot of engagement, like for example when we post on Facebook pages and all Twitter pages, you see that we get a lot of engagement, but with the people that know the business, yes, but what we also do is there is the audience for our local brands. So, they want to know, but where do I get premium meat as well for example, you know I just don't want to just buy the sausage that you sell at your Meatma outlet. I wanna buy the steak that you take the to the US,

or the steak that you take to Europe where do I buy that and then we try by all means to really communicate what we can like in terms of where you can buy them at. Just for your own knowledge as well, you can buy them at Fruit and Veg at your food lovers' market in Wenhil here where you get the steak with premium steak and those other things questions that people want to understand or is Meatco only for some people. Is it only for the whites, is it for the for the farmers or what you know. Stuff like that so yeah, I guess those are the two main ones.

Researcher

Just coming from what you just said, what do you pick up with some of the challenges as a communications practitioner, when you're communicating on social media. That you've been able. To pick up yourself.

PR 1

Yeah, that's like what I said. I'll go back again. It's just basically the ambiguity is a big thing because we are in a you know. It has a diverse audience obviously, you are communicating on Facebook you can't control the audiences, but you're going to communicate it to certain people, which are the farmers or for example your possible customers in terms of your Meatma outlet, so it's just the ambiguity and that's why I feel like we should expand. You always expand your communication, don't presume and assume that everybody understands what you're trying to communicate, so I think. Communication is there ever it will always humble you in terms of you. You never think that you are doing it right somehow. You know level. I thought no you were wrong.

Researcher

Now, when it comes to obviously social media, then this traditional media, in your view. What are some of the I would say differences that you've been able to pick up when you're using either one of these two mediums.

PR 1

OK. So. Should I maybe ask the traditional media you talking about or website?

Researcher

So let me just say in terms of traditional I'm looking at now your newspapers. I'm looking at your radio, your TV and your social is then obviously the various social media platforms.

PR 1

So, what would you ask me is? What are they?

Researcher

What are the key differences that you've been able to pick up as a practitioner?

PR 1

OK, and you know because of traditional media as you call it. Or yeah, we you can control what you take out, so it that makes it much, much better in terms of how you wanna also curb it in terms of what perception you want to give out. But in terms of social media really, you need to expect anything you do throw out the information, but you don't control for everybody or how somebody else perceives it and wants to react to it, because it's a reactionary everything. So those, I think, is always going to be that point where you need a small PR comes in. We need to always be on the ball and you need to always interact. You need to be timelessly in terms of your response to certain thing and not just like things for chance. Leave them for chance in terms of when people are really inPR 1ting with what you posted for what you have said or what they've seen in terms of your products, and you know. So that's why. I think no way most retail companies going wrong, I would say because, I mean people there was food I don't know, like a food query in terms of like something is not fresh, it's out yeah and then you don't respond to it, you just leave it out there thinking you know somebody will get over it. That that's the problem. You need to be responsive because that is why we have. This platform is for you to engage and for us at Meatco engagement with every stakeholder is very, very pertinent, and it's one of what drives our business. They want these people here because the cattle business is a very emotional business because you just don't just you just don't sell things obvious. Value property you sell, you know, just getting money that doesn't mean it's all just that so. This of our stakeholders, which are the most important ones, the most important ones. The farmers are very, very emotionally connected to what they sell and because they can just say no, they don't want to sell, one wrong word can kill the whole relationship.

Researcher

Not talking about that is a crisis that you had to deal with on social media or recently and how did you manage or handle?

PR 1

That, in terms of what was said in all that. We're not wrong. Uhm, yeah there was again last year. Uh-huh. Big one. We just had to obviously issue, you know press statements or collaborate with our

relevant regulators, we have what we call DVS, Directory Veterinary Services. We have the Meat Board them so we work closely with and they are our regulator so we would collide with them and you know issue press statements or ask the person that, for example, retracted or say something and make clear to the public, or especially to the stakeholders what you meant because it's actually causing a big you know unpleasant working environment with our people let me mention what happened here was a uh? Our Minister Calle Schletwein mentioned something on the News 8 in terms of our prices, and this pricing. If you ask anybody that is a farmer, they get emotional in terms of the prices they get for their cattle it's a personal thing like that, so this lead there was a bit of in the beginning of the year got people thinking all our farmers thinking that Meatco just basically doesn't want to pay farmers. You have the money that is actually not the case there's a lot of things that go with pricing and when viable, or what the current price we are issuing, is what it is, so we had to ask, you know our portfolio ministry, just to you know, just retract or, you know, elaborate on what they said and just not sit back and see that Meatco is not doing anything because it's really detrimental and it makes us lose our trust again the trust of our farmers because that is one of the words that you will see in terms of a Meatco vision or Meatco corporate value, trust with your people, you need that thing it's just. It's just that you can't take it away. You can't run this business without it yeah so basically, we had to just call in for like a retraction and you know he had to set the record straight in terms of producing articles that explain why we pay what we pay and then in explaining what the environment currently out there is, we there's a lot of other that you know play or that are at play in terms of pricing. Outside prices, international prices COVID-19 also the, the new famous person around us, you know basically that's what we did.

Researcher

In terms then of negative messages that you sometimes pick up on your social media platforms, how do you deal with it as a practitioner.

PR 1

We try to engage whoever is like on Facebook sometimes it's personal somebody might send you an email. Or inbox and we try to engage in explaining always take it to a form of doing further you know investigation just to really try and satisfy you but you can satisfy to a certain extend that you know have a perception or whatever can be changed because of this and this and that. Or we do this because in this so we just really engage robustly with people that have negative connotations or negative comments to give so basically, the bottom line is we engage robustly.

Researcher

Now in Meatco aside, aside from yourself, is there anybody else that is designated to handle social media? And if we if there is, who are those people?

PR 1

Yeah, he, his name is Philemon his our Multimedia guy so he also handled social media and obviously Rosa and then myself. So mostly at this point in time it's mostly me.

Researcher

In terms of determining what can be posted and cannot, who determines that?

PR 1

So obviously my manager determines that and yeah, so basically, we have to coordinate like that. Obviously, everything needs to go through her for her vetting because we don't, we not NBC or whatever, so we work in cahoots and we and obviously also I would say the higher management and the whole of EXCO will also dictate what goes out and what should not.

Researcher

Then in terms of a social media policy, do you have one?

PR 1

Yes, definitely we have one and we busy with it even now as you speak interesting to mention it. Educating we busy trying to finalise it and then we need to start educating. Firstly, our employees obviously is for the employees. Educate them in terms of how to handle deal with social media and then also under this designated, the designated individuals to post things on Meatco's platforms and what we can also do that for further then, or what other people that we that can post in terms of employees. Further, take that and repost it on their platforms so it's quite as you know, you are a media person. You need to know how to use this as a designated person and maybe putting it out because obviously when you take out there, anybody else can share it and put it out there. Or you know, elevate it to next level but as a Meatco employee, whether you're under communications or not, you should know what you are saying. You know what? You also elevating to the next level and how you are doing it and where you're also doing it.

Researcher

This is now going to the parts that I'm going to deal with now, will mainly focus in on the structure of the organisation. Now the first thing that I want to find out is if you look at your structure, this is the organisational structure. Do you believe that it supports your role as a communication practitioner, especially focusing on social media, or does it not?

PR 1

Definitely Meatco is a new media organisation it's a New World Organisation had it not supported we would not even have been here as a as a department, that is why even my manager sits on the EXCO at EXCO level because everything that is discussed at that level, she has to know about it and we then communicate. We have a very open transparent. We want to communicate timelessly and we want to communicate every little information to everybody, especially inhouse we owe our employees the right to know everything even before the media brings it out. So that is it's part of our HR policy where there is a communication or need to communicate, communicate effectively and its part of our corporate values. Where it says we need to communicate effectively again. So that is what I would say that the organisational structure and the organisation itself does cater for communication and the importance of communication, because then there would not be affected the trust even without with our external stakeholders and within the company.

Researcher

Again, I'm just moving on the aspect of obviously your manager sitting on EXCO now for instance, if there is something that happens within another department and now somebody raises it on social media, how easy is it for you to then get information from another executive or how easy is it for you to communicate directly with them and for them to give you feedback?

PR 1

Very easy they are channels as communications department every manager owes us every week, but I have, I decide I want to do a story on for example, my Head of Marketing he has to give me the time of the day, he just has to yes, it's like really, he's obliged to do it. I cannot go for three weeks I can go for one week, two weeks, three weeks without getting a response. It will be escalated because he owes me that, so they need to make time. It's basically within my JD that they need to make time all the communication queries or write ups or you know, sort of what you ask right now. very important and they are aware of it as well?

Researcher

Now it's interesting that you raised that, obviously they know the importance of providing you feedback now is aspect of let's say somebody hypothetically delays to not give you feedback in your view, some of the delays that you encounter how would you want them addressed from a structural point of view to make it easier for you?

PR 1

Again, then we'll go back to the structure and you go back to obviously you will go I will, talk about myself I will talk to my manager or take it at EXCO level, so this is what happens. It has happened before we will talk to the different departmental heads or the relevant people are supposed to get information from that guy, we have sent you this in this in this guy and if we have any feedback, please make time to always respond to such things because we it's not just for us, it might be something that came from somewhere and we need to give response. We need to give a feedback, or we need to whatever. Just yesterday we had to give her a you know response to a journalist. It's going to write something in today's newspaper and my Executive for what we call Safety, Health and Quality Insurance awarded me the time of the day and said no come sit with me will do the write up and whatever and then we send the response, so we work it's a very common vision, is a very close knit. You know aspect here. I'm not sure of other organisations as difficult it is, but it's this. It's very it's set on on the tip of the tables when there is something on communications, I follow up he gets intimate knowledge of them, so we have a timeline also which allows for the different Executives because they are busy, busy people to just work around your schedule as well in.

Researcher

In your role, role do you actually play in determining what then gets posted because you said, obviously your manager plays a role but yourself what role do you play in?

PR 1

Actually, I'm the one that that brings up to my manager to decide maybe I didn't mention that I'm the one that gives her as in terms of information we have weekly content creation I decide what has to be done, created, and always put it through to her. If she doesn't agree with this one, then obviously we take that one off, so that's the role I play I need to come with the content is what I do.

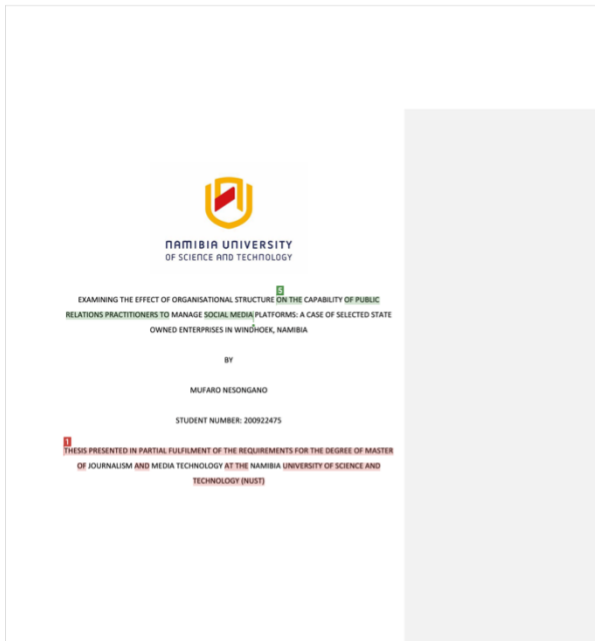
Researcher

You've got a graphic designer; you got a multimedia officer and then there's yourself. So, in creating this content that you now need to upload on social media. How is that? How does it work?

PR 1

It works like a bomb because obviously the graphic designer work with design whatever leaf level need to put out there for like let's say obviously every platform, we have a different type of way of communicating. In terms of you, either put a flyer out on your website to put a whole long, I mean article goes the people that people that go on the website and read they can read you can have timeline scroll or whatever and they wouldn't go on Twitter. You just want a quick quick part of thing of like no and you're done. So that's how they facilitate it we take the content that we create in terms of their writing we take pictures, and we'll create a flyer or a video we shouldn't we shoot something and then we had, and we post it even instantly if it's happening or we we posted according to our weekly communication schedule.

7.4 Appendix 4: Turnitin Report



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