THE USE OF TWITTER IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF THE ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES BOEING 737 MAX 8 FLIGHT ET302 CRASH ON 10th MARCH 2019

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MACSNRB919218

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Arts in Communication Studies (MACS) from St. Paul's University

September 2021

DECLARATION

Declaration by the Candidate

I declare that this thesis is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has never been presented for a masters' degree award in any other university.



26/05/2021

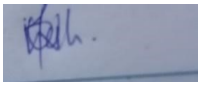
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Declaration by supervisors

This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.



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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughters, my husband, my father and my sister. To my late boss, Mr Simon Mwago, thank you for encouraging me to take up part time learning despite my duties at work. To my daughters, Alicia and Jenny, the sky is not the limit, rather, it is your floor.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Crisis

A crisis is described as an unforeseen event that casts doubt on reality and draws undue attention to itself. It occurs when an event becomes more intense, attracts the attention of the press, media, or government, disrupts routine business operations, devalues a positive public image, and has a negative impact on a company's bottom line. (Fink, 2011).

Crisis communication

It refers to the communications that the organization sends out through various channels to various stakeholders when faced with a crisis (Butterick, 2011).

Social media

These are a collection of web-based applications that build on the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social networks, blogs, issue discussion sites, content communities, and microblogs are among them (Coombs, 2011).

Crisis management

The perception of an unpredictably occurring incident that jeopardizes critical stakeholder expectations (Fink, 2011).

Pre-Crisis

Events that occur before the actual crisis occurs (Ely & Vardeman, 2014).

Crisis event

This is the actual crisis event (Ely & Vardeman, 2014).

Post crisis

Events that occur after the crisis event (Ely & Vardeman, 2014).

Tweet

Messages sent on Twitter that have a maximum of 140 characters (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

Tweep

A follower on Twitter whom a user interacts with (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

ABSTRACT

This research was conducted to analyze the role of Twitter in crisis management by having a look at the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash that occurred on 10th March 2019, barely six minutes after takeoff from Bole, Addis Ababa International Airport, Ethiopia. For this specific study, the researcher focused on Twitter and how it was used as a tool for communication in the last level of the three-step approach to crisis management. Four objectives guided the study; a) to establish the perceived ease of use of Twitter for crisis management by looking at the Ethiopian airplane's crash case, b) to find out the facilitating conditions influencing the use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines, c) to investigate the perceived usefulness of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines, d) to evaluate the social influence of Twitter as used for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines. The researcher used the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology theory as well as the Attribution Theory by Bernard Weiner (1986) to guide the study. The constructs of the UTAUT theory formed the basis of the research objectives while Attribution theory was used to explore crisis communication. Because of the nature of the data, the researcher applied a purely qualitative approach. The target population was 34 Twitter posts by Ethiopian Airlines done in March 2019. March was specifically chosen to represent communication after the event or post crisis. The posts were analyzed, divided into meaningful analytical units, and coded for content analysis. The study found that Twitter can indeed be a useful tool when used for communication by an organization during a crisis. Its simple structure as well as the keyword/hashtag feature makes it easy to use whereas the need to belong to a community is among facilitating conditions for its use. Its instantaneous feature and ability to reach multitudes fulfill perceived usefulness of the platform and lastly, its retweets feature assists in promoting social influence. Further research on how other social media platforms can be used by different companies for crisis communication is suggested.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to analyze the role that Twitter plays in communication during a crisis for organizations. The researcher intended to determine the perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, social influence and facilitating conditions of the platform when used for crisis management. This chapter comprises background to the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, justification, significance, scope of the study and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

1.1.1 Crisis Management

There are a variety of definitions of the term crisis from different scholars, but they all have some themes in common like uncertainty, surprise, danger, reputation, and stakeholders. Coombs (2007) defines it as the perception of an unanticipated incident that threatens significant stakeholder expectations and has the potential to negatively damage an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes. Despite the variety of definitions available for the term, it is evident that a crisis threatens the survival of an organization as it can cause financial loss, reputation damage, environmental damage as well as structural or property damage to mention but a few (Coombs, 2007). The remedy therefore is crisis communication, that is, accurate and factual communication from the organization regarding the existence of the crisis and the steps that the organization is taking to deal with it. During a crisis, crisis communication is an aspect of the crisis management plan, which seeks to overcome a shortage of time, factual information and resources. By providing guidelines for

successfully addressing crises, crisis management is aimed to fend off or decrease prospective and real hazards that an organization may face. At this point, it is important to note that advancement in communication technologies such as social media has changed the crisis management landscape by empowering stakeholders with more information and more avenues to express their opinion anywhere and at any time. Furthermore, today crises have no physical location, evolve at lightning speed, and can expose corporations, damaging their reputation badly.

In fact, Cutlip and Center (2013) assert that this has also affected how crisis communication is handled in organizations. Practitioners hence need crisis communication tools that can enable them to communicate to their stakeholders as fast as possible across different platforms to save the image of the company when faced with a crisis. This is where the instantaneous and interactive power of social media comes in, but caution must be put in place, and it is vital for a crisis manager to identify which channels will be best for the different target groups of the organization.

1.1.2 Social Media

Social media is explained by Kaplan and Hoenlein (2010) as a set of web-based apps that enable for the creation and exchange of user-generated content, based on the ideological and technological basis of Web 2.0. (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman et al., 2012) further define social media as online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage. This second definition sums up social media characteristics that can be beneficial to organizations to engage with their different stakeholders, especially in times of a crisis. Social media platforms are used to inform, persuade, educate, remind, and monitoring and evaluation efforts.

During a crisis, social media then becomes useful for combating viral videos and rumors, rogue websites, misinformation, speculation, and many other online threats for an organization. It is therefore important for any corporate organization to be present online in order to monitor what people are saying about it. This in turn helps in identification of issues, correcting false information, refuting rumors and evaluating how messages are being distributed, understood and accepted.

Social media platforms exist for different reasons but are commonly used by organizations to respond to direct questions, start conversations, link up with like-minded organizations as well as people, share and comment on news, empower their target publics and opinion leaders to become brand or cause ambassadors. More specifically, Kietzmann, Hermkens, & McCarthy, 2011) explain that Facebook for example is best used to distribute video, audio, text or photos with a wide variety of people. Twitter on the other hand can be used to share small amounts of information in real time and provides the opportunity to link with specific categories of target publics for example, advocates, ambassadors, bloggers and journalists whereas YouTube can be used to create and share content regarding an organization's causes, campaigns, products and services where stakeholders can watch and comment. Blogs are also part of social media networks that can be used as online journals, open for comments whether private or public. For this study, the researcher intends to focus on Twitter.

1.1.2.1 Twitter

Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are the top five social networking sites in the world, according to evidence (Dance, 2010). When looking at Ethiopian Airlines social media presence, the organization has the most following on Facebook with one million, seven hundred and eighty two thousand, one hundred and

ninety seven followers but with their Twitter account coming in second with three hundred and fifty five thousand, four hundred followers. On investigation into the content shared on the two platforms, it was found that though their Facebook account had more followers, there was more engagement on their Twitter account as compared to Facebook. It is based on this fact that the researcher chose to analyze how the organization used Twitter to communicate when one of their aircrafts, the Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crashed on 10th March 2019 in Bishoftu, barely 6 minutes after takeoff from the Bole International Airport in Ethiopia.

1.2 Statement of the problem

For the families of 176 individuals who were on board the Ukraine International Airlines Flight P5752, the 8th of January 2020 will forever remain in their hearts. On this fateful day, the Boeing 737-800 airplane crashed shortly after takeoff from Imam Khomeini International Airport, Tehran, Ukraine. ("Iran Plane Crash", 2020) documents that the plane turned around shortly after leaving the airport's airspace but crashed minutes later. The accident created a huge debate online with a hashtag #P5752 trending on Twitter as it happened amid escalating tensions between the US and Iran. To fuel the debate further, some world leaders shared that the aircraft was brought down having evidence to back their claim. What followed was a video which was uploaded on YouTube by an Iranian citizen, showing that the aircraft was hit by two missiles. Three days later, the Iranian military issued a statement confirming that the plane was brought down by their missiles, but "unintentionally".

Closer home, the Algerian military plane crash which is considered the second worst tragic air accident to happen in the country. ("Algeria Military Plane Crash", 2018) reports that the plane that was carrying soldiers and their families crashed a few

kilometers south of Algiers shortly after take-off killing 257 people on the spot and leaving behind a few survivors. The story broke online with a video of the accident spreading like wildfire. The Algerian military would give regular updates and statements which were shared on traditional media and social networking sites as well.

For the cases mentioned above, it is evident that one cannot ignore social media in times of a crisis. This position is further asserted by Johnston and Sheehan (2014) who refer to a survey conducted in 2012 where 100 businesses ranging from small enterprises to multinational corporations were analyzed to find out whether they included social media as part of their crisis management process. The results illustrated that 41% of them did not include social media in their crisis management plans. Furthermore, one in every three firms admitted to the lack of know-how in regard to using social media channels to respond to a crisis.

Additionally, since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, there are more online transactions than ever before. Businesses, studies, meetings and even payments are done online. This begs the question, should a crisis occur for an organization, why ignore online platforms and use traditional forms of communication when everybody else is actually online? It is in this regard that the researcher undertook the study to explore the various ways in which social media, Twitter to be specific, was used to communicate during a crisis using the Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crash which occurred on 10th March 2019 killing all 157 passengers and crew members on board shortly after take-off from Bole International Airport Ethiopia as a case study.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of Twitter for crisis management. Specifically, the researcher's focus was on the application of the platform as used by Ethiopian airlines Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash that occurred on the 10th of March 2019.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives were:

a) To establish the perceived ease of use of Twitter for crisis management by looking at the Ethiopian airplanes crash case.

b) To determine the facilitating conditions that influenced the use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines during their 10th March 2019 crash.

c) To investigate the perceived usefulness of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines during their 10th March 2019 crash.

d) To evaluate the social influence of Twitter as used for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines during their 10th March 2019 crash.

1.4 Research Questions

The following specific research questions will be used to guide the study:

1. What was the perceived ease of use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopia Airlines during the 10th March 2019 airplane crash crisis?

2. What were the facilitating conditions for the use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian Airlines during the 10th March 2019 airplane crash crisis?
3. To what extent was Twitter perceived to be useful as a tool for crisis management for Ethiopian Airlines during the March 2019 airplane crash crisis?
4. What was the social influence of Twitter's use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian Airlines during the 10th March 2019 airplane crash?

1.5 Research Justification

The overall aim of this study was to find out how Twitter can be leveraged by an organization to communicate when faced with a crisis which in this case would be the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash that occurred on 10th March 2019 killing all 157 passengers and crew members on board six minutes after takeoff from Bole International Airport, Ethiopia.

The researcher’s objective was to conduct a study that will aid communication professionals in their practice as well as students in crisis management and incorporating social media into the crisis communication plan. As aforementioned by Johnston and Sheehan (2014), a survey conducted in 100 small enterprises and multinational corporations revealed that 41% did not include social media as part of their crisis communication plans further explaining the need for the study.

1.6 Significance of the study

Social media cannot be ignored during crisis response. As Johansen and Frandsen (2007) denote, failure to handle social media correctly or lack of social media

presence completely can result in a double crisis. A double crisis materializes when the original crisis is overshadowed by a communication crisis because the organization has failed to carry out the expected communication practices. Therefore, it is almost impossible to ignore social media use when organizations respond to crises. This study was deemed important to showcase just how the power of social media can be utilized for crisis communication and management. Additionally, there is plenty of research on social media but very little to write home about how social media, Twitter to be specific can be used for crisis communication hence the need for the study. Research in this new area will therefore increase knowledge on how to incorporate Twitter as a tool of communication for crisis management by reviewing the platform's characteristics and how best to use it.

1.7 Scope of the study

This study was limited to Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash which occurred on 10th March 2019 killing all 157 passengers and crew members on board shortly after takeoff from Bole International Airport Ethiopia. More specifically, the researcher analyzed conversations about the crash as shared on Twitter by the organization itself. Owing to the nature of the data, a qualitative research methodology was applied for the study, that is, the 34 posts that were shared in the month of March 2019 after the event occurred were analyzed for purposes of tracking post crisis communication. They were then coded for content analysis.

1.8 Limitations

This study was limited to Ethiopian Airlines Twitter profile which consisted of 34 posts shared when the accident happened in March 2019. Since this was limited to Twitter only, the study cannot be generalized to the entire world of Twitter and/or social media.

1.9 Summary

This chapter looked at background information of the concepts to be discussed, problem statement, study objectives including both general and specific objectives, research questions, research justification, significance, scope, as well as limitations as encountered in the course of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter assessed relevant literature related to the study. The literature here was reviewed with the aim of evaluating various strategies and procedures useful in investigating social media and crisis communication. To guide the study, two theories were used, that is, Unified Theory of Acceptance & Use of Technology and the Attribution theory.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Unified Theory of Acceptance & Use of Technology (UTAUT)

This theory was introduced by (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, et al., 2003) as an accumulation of different models and theories of technology acceptance that represent varied research initiatives. These contributing theories include the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Motivational Model, Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), a combination of TAM and TPB, Model of PC Utilization, Innovation Diffusion Theory and lastly, Social Cognitive Theory. The UTAUT theory is set on four theoretical constructs that represent determinants of use behavior or the intention to use. These constructs are the basis of the research objectives for the study. The first construct is performance expectancy which refers to the degree to which a person believes that using the system will help him/her attain gains in job performance. Research dictates that performance expectancy is the strongest predictor of intention among technology acceptance models and theories. For this study, the researcher examined the perceived usefulness of Twitter as used to communicate during the Ethiopian Airplanes crash.

Secondly, the effort expectancy construct which is explained as the extent of ease associated with the use of the system and has three variables under it, that is, perceived ease of use, complexity, and ease of use. For the purpose of this study, the researcher reviewed how useful Twitter was deemed to be in order to be used for crisis communication during the Flight ET302 crash.

Thirdly, social influence which is explained as the degree to which an individual perceives others as important, for example family and friends, believe he/she should use the new system or a particular technology. Variables under social influence include subjective norm, social factors, and image. The researcher intends to investigate whether and how social influence was a factor in choosing Twitter as a communication channel for Ethiopian Airplanes when the Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crashed.

Lastly, facilitating conditions which refers to the degree to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system. Variables under this construct include: perceived behavioral control, facilitating conditions and compatibility.

This theory informed the study variables as the constructs formed the basis of the research objectives.

2.2.1 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory postulates that individuals will search for the causes of events, that is, they will make attributions of responsibility and will have an emotional reaction to the situation. These emotions can also affect how the individual chooses to interact with those affected by the event. The core emotions in this theory are anger and

sympathy. Attributions of responsibility and emotions can serve as motivations for actions (Coombs, 2007). It is said that when a person (or organization) is judged to be responsible for an event, behavioral responses are negative, and anger is provoked. Furthermore, behavioral responses are favourable and sympathy is generated when the individual or organization is perceived not to be responsible for the catastrophe. Surprisingly, a crisis is regarded as a threat, implying potential harm to an organization's reputation if no action is taken. In addition to organizational reputation, the threat can be in the form of reduced purchase intentions and a high possibility of sharing information about the organization from a negative point of view. People are known to either blame the organization or the situation.

Attribution theory was therefore used as a crisis management model in the early 90's and further research on the theory birthed the Situational Crisis Communication theory that aims to match reputational repair strategies to the crisis situation (Coombs, 2007). In this study, attribution theory aided the researcher in identifying attributions made by the public from the conversations off the Twitter account of the Ethiopian Airlines and the reputational threat presented by the Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash crisis.

2.3 Conceptual framework

In order to provide a systematic overview of how Twitter plays a role in crisis management in organizations, the researcher developed a conceptual model (see figure 2.1). Ravitch & Riggan (2012) define an independent variable as a variable that is stable and unaffected by the other variables that we are trying to measure while a dependent variable is that which relies on other factors that are being measured. The conceptual model identifies the independent variables as perceived ease of use, facilitating conditions, perceived usefulness and social influence of Twitter. The

dependent variable is, therefore, crisis management. In other words, the researcher intends to examine how perceived ease of use, facilitating conditions, perceived usefulness and social influence of Twitter affect crisis management.

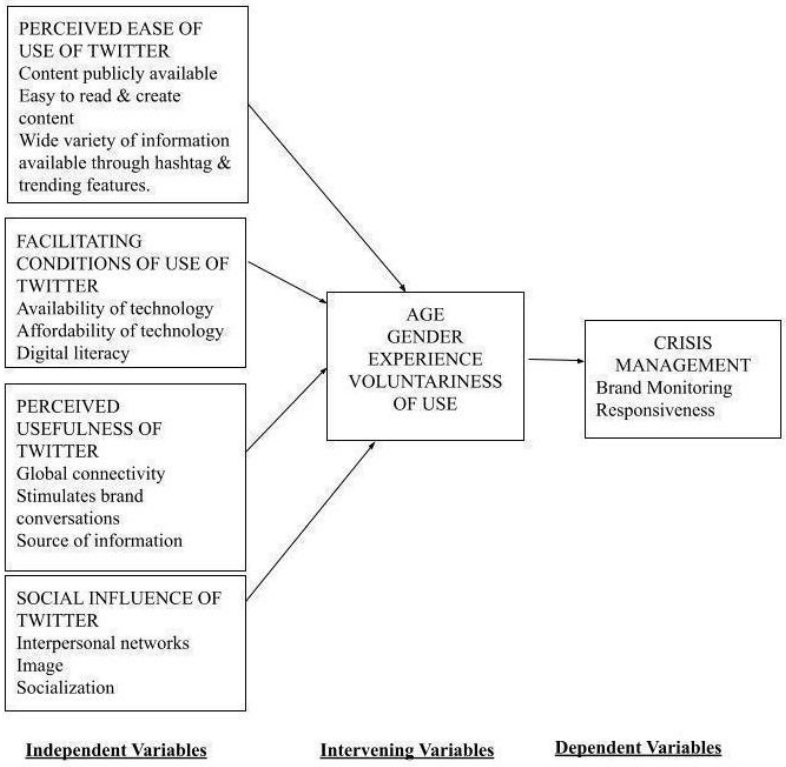


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

Age, gender, experience and voluntariness of use are also included in the model as intervening variables. These are factors that mediate the relationship between two other factors. The youth are more likely to use social media for communication as compared to the older generation. In addition, women use social media more than men and for different purposes. (Vermeren, 2015) is of the opinion that women are more likely to use social media to communicate with friends and family, but men are more likely to use it for commercial objectives. There is also the issue of experience. If an individual does not use social media, be it for personal or business reasons, he/she would not acquire the know-how of it. Such an individual is likely to miss out on

trending topics on Twitter. By comparison, a young communication practitioner that is tasked with managing the social media presence of his/her place of work and uses the same for connecting with friends is more likely to quickly take part in any trending topic on Twitter because of his/her experience.

2.4 Crisis Management

A crisis is described by Fink (2011) as a phenomenon that occurs when an event becomes more intense, attracts the attention of the press, media, or government, obstructs typical business prospects, devalues a positive public image, and has a negative impact on a company's bottom line. Furthermore, a crisis tends to raise doubts and suspicions about reality, as well as the risks that may arise as a result. The nature of a crisis is that it is unpredictable and because of this, it is important for organizations to have a clear plan on how to deal with a crisis when it strikes. This plan is part of crisis management, and the focus is on the future, with the goal of anticipating and preparing for occurrences that could jeopardize vital stakeholder relationships. This leads us to crisis communication which comes into play when the organization communicates about the crisis to key stakeholders. This involves how an organization will respond, how it communicates, the timeline of responses, the channels of communications selected, and the messages sent about the crisis and how it has affected the organization. As Butterick (2011) explains, in a world where the media are hungry for news and the various 24-hour platforms available, the value and importance of communication cannot be underestimated.

2.4.1 Crisis communication plan

Larkin (2000) denotes that when faced with a crisis, the worst thing an organization can do is lie. The second is to be quiet and say nothing. The most important thing is to

tell it all, as soon as possible, and as truthfully as possible. This clearly demonstrates the need for crisis communication when an organization communicates about a crisis to key stakeholders. This involves how it responds, how it communicates, the timeline of responses, communication channels chosen along with the messages sent about the crisis and how it has affected the organization. Butterick (2011) suggests that in a world where the media are hungry for news and the various 24-hour platforms available, the value and importance of communication cannot be underestimated. The choice of communication channel is a key factor to consider when communicating to different stakeholders. It must be quick, reach the target audiences and be able to show what other people are saying about the crisis and the organization. In this era where people spend a substantial amount of time online, it is possible that this conversation will concurrently happen online. With this in mind, it is almost suicidal for corporations to ignore social media especially in times of a crisis as it can break or make an organization. Butterick (2011) adds that the plan, the management team, the communication method, and the post-crisis review make up a crisis communication plan. Social media comes in as a communication tool especially where there is a need to give information quickly and to large groups of people. These messages should be tailored according to the target audiences, and the staff of an organization should not be left out as it would be very embarrassing if the staff found out about a crisis affecting the organization they work for from external sources.

2.5 Social Media

The term "social media" refers to a group of web-based apps that are founded on Web 2.0's conceptual and technological foundations and allow for the production and sharing of user-generated content (Kaplan & Hoenlein, 2010).

There may be plenty of social media applications present but what is most important for crisis managers and communication practitioners at large is to find the best platform that will give the best results. Coombs (2007) and Kietzmann et al. (2011) group them into different categories as social networks which allow users to exchange information and communicate with others, blogs which are online journals that are open for comments, whether private or corporate, micro-blogs which allow users to share small amounts of information in real time such as Twitter, content communities like YouTube and Flickr where individuals are able to create and comment on content which may be audio-visual and/or visual in nature in this category and lastly, topic discussion sites that enable users to share content and engage in discussions.

Despite the fact that social media is broken down into small groups and categories, their characteristics are more or less the same. They are participation where social media networks encourage engagement among users. Organizations can use this to their advantage as an avenue to collect information from their target audiences on their perceptions towards the firm. Secondly, conversation where social media, unlike many other types of traditional media, is a two-way communication channel. As a result, an organization could interact with a user and vice versa. Thirdly, connectedness in that social media platforms enable different users from across many parts of the globe to link up on similar issues. Finally, instantaneous which explains the potential for social media to reach out to a large number of people in an instant, transmitting valuable information to the masses.

2.5.1 Social media as a tool of crisis communication.

As previously mentioned, social media has shifted the crisis communication landscape by empowering stakeholders with more avenues to communicate anywhere

at any time provided they have an internet connection (Ely & Vardeman, 2014). This has also resulted in a situation where crises have no physical location, evolve at lightning speed, and can expose corporations, damaging their reputation badly. Additionally, the first stop for a good number of people in search of news nowadays is social media. This then makes it very important for organizations to be present online and aware of what is going on.

Ely and Vardeman (2014) continue to note that as technology continues to integrate itself into business, the effectiveness of using social media to deliver information during a crisis, raise awareness of situations and involve the public increases. In the three stages of a crisis, pre-crisis, during the crisis occurrence, and after the crisis, social media can be utilized as a tool for crisis communication. At the pre-crisis stage, social media can be used for sending pre-warnings, alerts and preparation methods in case of an emergency. Social media can also be used to gather what users are saying about the firm.

During the crisis event, it can be employed to keep the public informed with real time events and news about the crisis. After the event has occurred, social media can then be used to post updates about the event and what the organization has done or plans to do to prevent a repeat of the same. Though there may be different applications each with their own set of advantages and disadvantages, the researcher chose Twitter for this particular study.

2.5.2 Twitter

With over 500 million tweets every day, Twitter has around 192 million monthly active users. Twitter users prefer to visit the site more often than Facebook users, with

46% visiting the platform daily and 29% visiting the platform many times a day (Duggan & Smith, 2013).

Furthermore, Ethiopian Airlines is active on Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram with Facebook having the highest number of followers and Twitter coming in at second place. However, Twitter was noted to have more engagement than Facebook and hence was selected for the study.

The platform is a popular microblogging service that allows users to share real-time messages (tweets) of up to 140 characters. These tweets can be reshared and replied to by other users following the organization. The platform also has the trending feature that shows users the popular topics in their city/town, country, and continent as well as the world. Its instantaneous feature makes it possible for an organization to use it to spread information quickly. It is because of its speed characteristic and ability to reach multitudes that it is considered by many organizations as the best among social media platforms for communication. However, it is important to note that age, gender, experience, and willingness to use such platforms are all characteristics that influence their utilization.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) refer to a Pew Internet Research report that indicated the number of women on social media platforms was higher compared to that of men. Venkatesh, Morris, & Davis (2000) further add that the different gender's choice of social media platform is driven by different factors. Men are driven by perceived usefulness while women are more motivated by process factors as well as social influence.

2.6 Perceived Ease of Use of Twitter

Twitter is not a complicated platform and can be used by a majority of individuals provided they have access to the internet. All one needs to do is create your Twitter

handle, set a password and you're in. Sending a tweet only requires an individual to create content with a maximum of 140 characters and press the tweet button. The content can be in the form of words, pictures and videos or a combination of all. As Jaidka, Zhou and Lekles (2018) assert, Twitter is perceived to be easy to use because of a number of factors. The first one is the fact that the messages are publicly available. This means that anybody who logs in to Twitter can find any information on the platform provided it was posted and not deleted. Secondly, the platform has less restrictions on content access as compared to other platforms that would require a user to get content from his/her own social network such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Finally, through the hashtag feature, the platform makes it possible for users to have access to a wide array of ideas. The use of hashtags in tweets means that the user may have an interest in the topic or may even be an expert on the same.

2.7 Perceived usefulness of Twitter Use

This variable refers to the benefits of the platform. Social media use is now more widespread among corporate and individuals all over the world (Oyza & Edwin, 2015). On top of that, social media has provided users with new forms of empowerment and means through which messages can be shared. One of the reasons that organizations and individuals alike choose to use Twitter as their preferred channel of information is because the platform Twitter has a feature that shows the trending topics per geographical region. A firm can therefore log into their Twitter account and check on the trending topics. They can even go a step further and contribute to the conversation if it aligns with the organization's intentions and goals. An organization can also trend for good or bad reasons. In the event it's for the wrong reasons, the crisis management plan must be executed immediately. Twitter can therefore be used as a source of information, for brand monitoring purposes and crisis

communication tools. In addition, users seeking attention and more followers are fond of the retweet feature. To retweet is simply to reshare a tweet that a user deems important. Furthermore, retweeting influential people will draw attention to a user's handle. Social media users engage the social sites to raise awareness online and to market their products and services. According to Oyza and Edwin (2015), social media is also used for building social networks, exchanging ideas and knowledge.

2.8 Facilitating Conditions for the use of Twitter

These are conditions under which a related social media platform should operate. Venkatesh et al. (2003) define the facilitating conditions that allow an individual to use a system. Communication technologies are documented to have changed the way people communicate either for business or personal reasons. The availability and affordability of smartphones has seen more and more people go online. Furthermore, the internet is easily accessible in many countries across the globe reducing geographical boundaries and making communication easier. This can be summed up as digital literacy. The basic knowledge of computers and the internet and the ability and skills to use them is important when one wants to actively engage on social media. People with higher knowledge of computers and the internet will be more likely to interact on the digital platform efficiently and effectively (Ndavula, 2018). Availability of internet connection means that people can access Twitter easily and engage with others on the platform. Moreover, age and experience are moderators in facilitating conditions' usage with a possibility of a higher effect among older people with experience.

Additionally, a study conducted by Rodríguez and Fernández (2017) revealed that facilitating conditions in the use of Facebook influenced positively perceived importance of the platform.

These findings can be replicated in this study to suggest that resources and support available for Twitter users influence the intention and voluntariness to use it. This study therefore believes that facilitating conditions significantly affect the adoption of Twitter as a crisis management tool.

2.9 Social Influence for Use of Twitter

An individual's social system or the community within which he/she interacts will influence the individual's choice(s) of social media platforms used. Again, social influence is important because as users start to use something and become familiar with it, they will ask people around them to use it as well. As Ndunge (2017) asserts, interpersonal networks control one's choice of which social media platform to use or if they should use social media to begin with.

On the flip side, the community's cohesiveness toward social media, has an impact on its use (Rogers, 2003). Rogers further explains that how a person is socialized influences their personal belief which eventually influences the choice of communication channels they adopt to send and receive messages. These beliefs are molded by religious affiliations, culture and societal expectations. When looking at gender differences in use of social media, results from a study conducted by Mazman and Usleul (2009) suggest that the impact of social influence on females' choices is more powerful and immense in comparison with the impact from personal decisions. On the other hand, the impact of personal decisions is stronger and more dominant for men in contrast to social influence.

2.10 Summary of Literature reviewed

Despite millions of people being active on different social media sites, there is limited research as to how Twitter in particular has been used by crisis managers for crisis communication, making this a researchable area of study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the procedures employed to produce responses to the research questions. It focused on research approach, research design, target population, sampling procedure, data collection methods, data analysis methods, validity, reliability, and ethical issues.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher used purely qualitative research methods which Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) describe as methods that include designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data. Kothari and Garg (2014) further assert that qualitative research involves documenting real events, recording what actual people say, observing specific behaviors, scrutinizing written documents and investigating visual images. The researcher will therefore use this approach owing to the nature of the data collected from Twitter. Content analysis was then used to analyze the data.

Content analysis is defined by Kothari and Garg (2014) as a method for evaluating the content, information, and symbols in written texts or other forms of communication. It involves analysis of data from a communication medium which is systematically recorded and analyzed. For this study, the researcher used the Ethiopian Airlines Twitter conversations and responses during the 10th March 2019 Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash.

The conversation held after the crisis that is from 10th March up to the 31st of March formed the basis of the study population to cater for post crisis communication. Content analysis was then carried out to examine, code and interpret these messages.

3.3 Research population

Research population is identified by Flick (2011) as an aggregate of all possible study objects that include selection or samples chosen from the population and results are generalized from samples to populations. The researcher used messages sent by the organization and the engagement from tweeps regarding the Boeing 737 Max Flight ET302 crash. Though Ethiopian Airlines has more followers on Facebook than Twitter, the latter will be selected because there is more engagement on the platform as compared to the former. A total of 34 posts were made by the airline from 10th to 31st March 2019 after the accident were selected as the basis of the study.

3.4 Sample size

The researcher used a non-probability sampling method which is described as a process of identifying members of a population for a study by relying on his/her own judgement. A predetermined criteria was therefore employed to guide the process, that; Twitter was selected from other social media platforms; that the research would only focus on posts done by Ethiopian Airlines on their official Twitter handle and that the posts done after the event & in the month of March only were examined.

Table 3.1: Sample Size

No.	Date	URL	Retweet	Fav. Count
1	10/03/2019 9:15:29	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104672110994210816	3102	2793
2	10/03/2019 9:30:52	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104675981539852288	2277	1707
3	10/03/2019 10:03:38	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104684228602744834	975	897
4	10/03/2019 11:14:16	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104702003924619264	2401	2267
5	10/03/2019 12:25:34	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104719946808991745	208	361
6	10/03/2019 14:03:18	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104744539686866944	2557	2243
7	10/03/2019 15:21:08	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104764128944680961	687	961
8	11/03/2019 4:19:51	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1104965069710999552	621	961
9	11/03/2019 4:39:36	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1105056691891175424	858	1727
10	12/03/2019 16:15:09	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1105539231399710721	287	1103
11	13/03/2019 08:23:39	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1105746231308046336	94	196
12	14/03/2019 05:45:28	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1106068808454860800	767	1868
13	14/03/2019 06:41:40	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1106082950188359681	91	202
14	14/03/2019 09:32:05	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1106125839815634949	267	819

15	15/03/2019 06:51:48	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1106447888576638976	202	649
16	17/03/2019 16:06:11	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1107312179705991169	226	717
17	19/03/2019 08:56:52	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1107928917451644928	27	142
18	20/03/2019 06:41:54	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1108257339843510272	292	1434
19	21-03-19 11:12	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1108687807726399488	856	1459
20	21/03/2019 12:02:49	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1108700486016946178	2113	3029
21	22/03/2019 07:57:30	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1109001139972947969	774	1328
22	22/03/2019 17:06:21	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1109139260886667267	167	511
23	23/03/2019 07:30:39	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1109356769581719552	63	351
24	24/03/2019 06:25:13	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1109702690874028032	35	162
25	25/03/2019 06:16:25	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110062863308255233	230	736
26	25/03/2019 12:01:31	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110149710197723140	153	585
27	26/03/2019 05:15:39	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110409958628212736	61	350
28	26/03/2019 09:04:53	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110467647680991233	283	1134
29	27/03/2019 05:01:39	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110768823525957632	110	272
30	27/03/2019 12:49:24	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1110886537284202496	83	588
31	28/03/2019 07:11:44	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1111163948525674501	211	815
32	29/03/2019 07:12:32	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1111526537050898432	83	359

33	30/03/2019 05:52:21	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1111868745616633856	284	1201
34	31/03/2019 08:23:47	https://twitter.com/flyethiopian/status/1112269244241268736	43	225

Source: Twitonomy (2021).

3.5 Instruments of data collection

3.5.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is defined by Lune and Berg (2017) as a rigorous, extensive, and methodical investigation and interpretation of a body of material in order to identify patterns, themes, assumptions, and interpretations. They add that its purpose is to "code" the information as data that may be used to answer the research questions. The researcher applied a textual analysis of the airline's social media activity one month post crisis. This analysis enabled the researcher to have an in-depth look at how the airline used Twitter to communicate after the crisis occurred. The analysis also involved frequency of messages sent out by the organization and divided into different themes which were brand promotion, crisis communication and news. The data was then coded in a manner that helped the researcher derive answers for the research questions. Twitonomy application was used to retrieve these conversations as Wasim (2015) describes it as an application that allows a researcher to search for a keyword and/or user and retrieve data for analysis. The data may be in the form of visuals such as tweets, retweets, replies, mentions and hashtags. The web-based application can also provide insights into Twitter users for instance tweets posted per day, retweets, user mentions, links, tweets retweeted and favorited to mention but a few.

3.6 Data collection procedure

The researcher collected data that was posted after the accident for the purpose of capturing communication during the crisis event and post crisis communication which is key in crisis management. In addition, in the beginning, the study intended to examine posts done between February, March and April 2019 but because of the large quantity of posts, the researcher made the decision to focus on post crisis communication which equally achieves the goal of recording communication done after a crisis. These conversations were downloaded from the Twitonomy application and then categorized into themes and codes using SPSS Version 21 data analyst tool. From the data, the key themes identified were brand promotion, crisis communication and news. Thereafter, presentation and interpretation of the data is discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Tweets published on Twitter are in the public domain and hence there was no need to acquire permission to use the information unless the tweets are protected. The nature of protected tweets is that only users that follow an individual will have access to their tweets. The researcher does not follow any of the tweeps that tweeted Ethiopian Airplanes at the time of the accident and therefore any protected tweets were excluded from analysis.

The findings have been depicted in graphs and/or tables after the data has been analyzed. The complete data collection process took four weeks, from April 1st to April 30th, 2021.

3.7 Reliability and validity

Kothari and Garg (2014) assert that a research instrument is reliable if it provides consistent results. The use of online conversation analysis by the researcher helped to provide an audit trail, ensuring a permanent record of original data for Twitter. This allows reviewers of this study to examine the researcher's process and assess the

accuracy of the conclusions made in this study, thus ensuring reliability (Mohajan, 2017).

Validity on the other hand refers to the extent to which differences found within a measuring instrument reflect the true difference among those being tested. The researcher consulted with lecturers at St Paul's to ensure the coding sheets are as valid as possible.

3.8 Data Analysis

Twitonomy application was used to collect qualitative data, that is, 34 posts from Ethiopian Airlines Twitter handle in March 2019 were transcribed then grouped into meaningful analytical units. These posts were posted after the accident, that is from 10th to 31st March 2019, and capture communication during the crisis event and post crisis communication. Grouping of the units into various categories then followed and were coded for content analysis using SPSS version 21 tool. Steps followed in qualitative analysis were: preliminary exploration of the data by reading the transcripts; coding the data through segmentation and text labelling; use of codes to develop themes and aggregate same codes together; connect and interrelate themes; and construct a narrative (Creswell, 2009).

3.9 Ethical considerations

This section highlights the ethical concerns that may arise during the project process and the steps taken by the researcher to protect the dignity of study subjects and publication of well referenced information.

3.9.1 Ethical Issues Related to Research

The researcher, at all stages of the research project, upheld academic freedom and has represented the data analyzed as is without fabrication. In addition, the study was fully funded by the researcher herself therefore eliminating the possibility of sponsorship from outside sources who may specify needs or have specific demands that could have led to distorted findings. The study was also subjected to a plagiarism checker, which is Turnitin, to avoid the possibility of committing plagiarism. Finally, the researcher was guided by St Paul's University code of conduct during the study period and asserted it to the letter.

3.9.2 Ethical Issues Related to Research Subjects

Although the information obtained is in the public domain, the researcher will not use it for any other purpose other than the research itself, therefore upholding safety of the research subjects. Moreover, the research would only focus on the content and not who said what. Lastly, the researcher received a research permit from NACOSTI that gave the authorization for collection of data.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter looked at research design, target population, sample and sampling technique that the study used. It has also discussed data collection instruments, how that data was analyzed, and the ethical issues considered while conducting the study. This chapter therefore takes us to the next step of data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

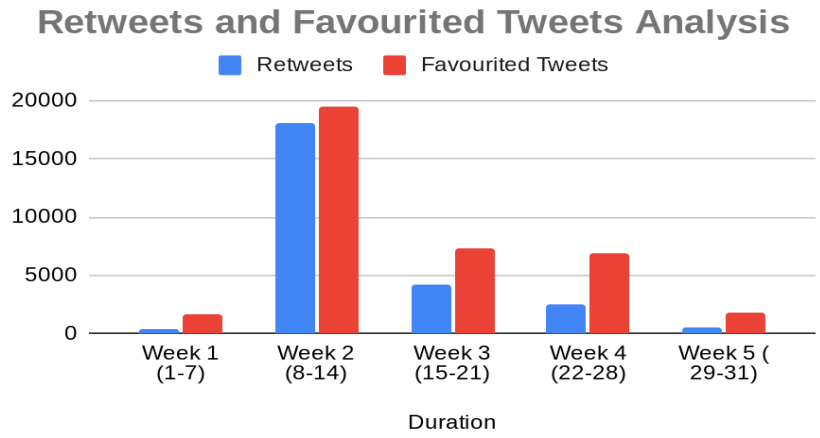
4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the key issues related to data presentation, analysis and interpretation and discussion of findings on the use of Twitter in crisis management using the conversations seen on Ethiopian Airlines' Twitter account when one of their planes crashed in Ethiopia in 2019. Specifically, the chapter covers analysis of the 34 posts, the frequency, thematic issues revealed and conclusions from findings based on study objectives.

4.2 Data presentation and analysis.

The researcher intended to analyze the conversations shared on Ethiopian Airlines' Twitter page in the month of March 2019 when the Boeing 737 crashed.

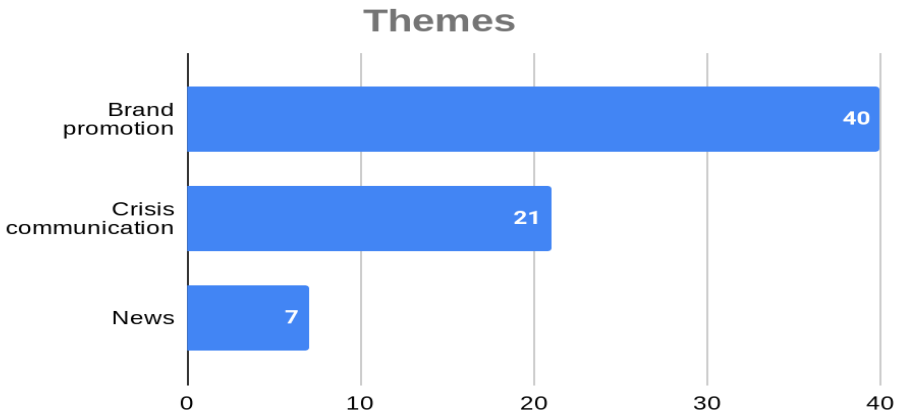
Graph 4.1 Retweets and Favorited Tweets Analysis



Graph 4.1 shows which tweets received most likes as well as reshared number of tweets. The graph illustrates that during week 2 which is when the accident happened, Ethiopian Airlines had the highest engagement in the month of March. From this, the

researcher can explain this phenomenon using attribution theory in that, more people were online in that particular week and were attempting to make sense of the event by seeking for and sharing information (Coombs, 2007). This demonstrates that people will turn to Twitter for information, especially in times of crisis.

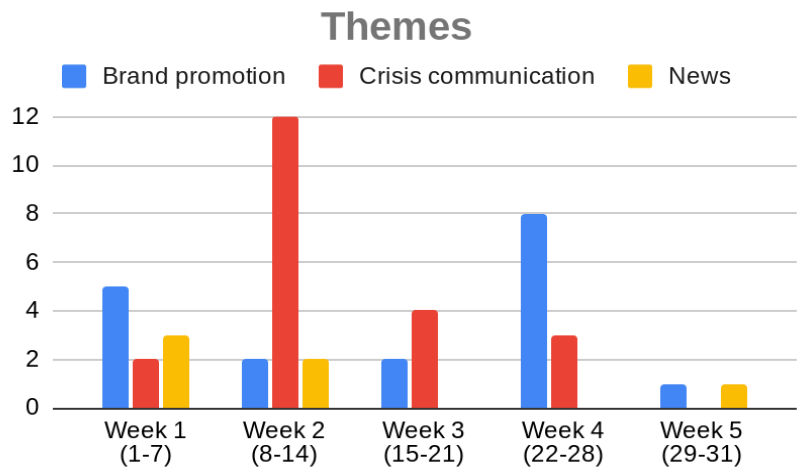
Graph 4.2 Top 3 Themes Identified



The top three themes identified in the tweets were as shown in graph 4.2 with brand promotion taking a lead. Graph 4.3 gives a breakdown of the themes as per each week of March. The graph shows that during week 1, brand promotion messages took the lead. However, during week 2 when the accident happened, crisis communication messages took the lead and the same happened in week 3. Akar and Mardikyan (2015) assert that the most important time to communicate during a crisis is immediately after the event has happened. The scholars go ahead to explain that this communication is important in order to get ahead of the situation, prevent information vacuum and be in control of the situation. Furthermore, as attribution theory denotes, people will seek information when a crisis occurs and will take in any information presented out there whether factual or false. It is upon the crisis communication manager to ensure timely communication of updates to avoid spreading rumors and false information which can harm an organization's reputation. Choosing the most appropriate channel of communication is key and Ethiopian Airlines chose to use

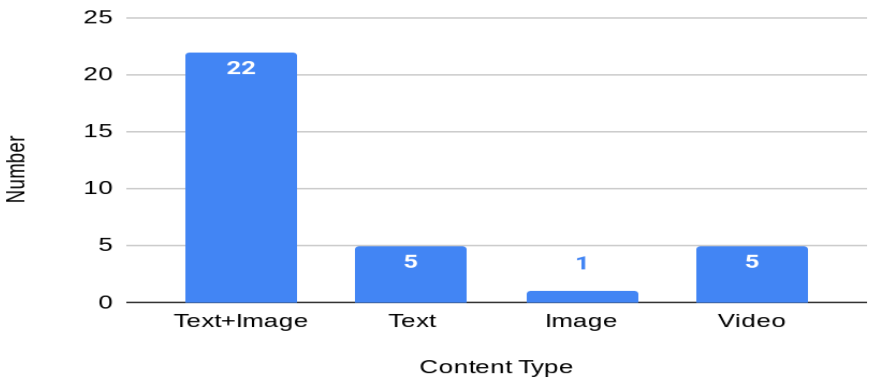
Twitter because of its instantaneous feature as well as ability to reach multitudes in minutes.

Graph 4.3 Themes identified per week



Graph 4.3 illustrates the different themes represented in the messages sent out by the airline. At the top of the list, Twitter was used to send out brand promotion messages with crisis communication coming in second. From this, the researcher can deduce that the platform was used to share out messages about the Ethiopian Airlines brand.

Graph 4.4 Content type of tweets



The graph above shows the different types of messages shared on the Ethiopian Airlines page during the month of March 2019. The most common content type shared was an image with a brief description explaining the image.

Discussions

Fearn-Banks (2011) asserts that during a crisis, social media (Twitter) is a useful approach for participating in two-way communication and immediately distributing information. Crisis management appears to be a secondary benefit. To begin with, the spread of tweets by retweets can be regarded as a measure of the relative popularity of specific subjects and authors. In this case, the popular subject was the accident, and the data suggests that people were online searching for answers as to what actually happened. This is cemented by the figure 4.1 which shows the first communication from Ethiopian Airlines, Accident bulletin 1 as the most retweeted tweet during the month of March 2019.

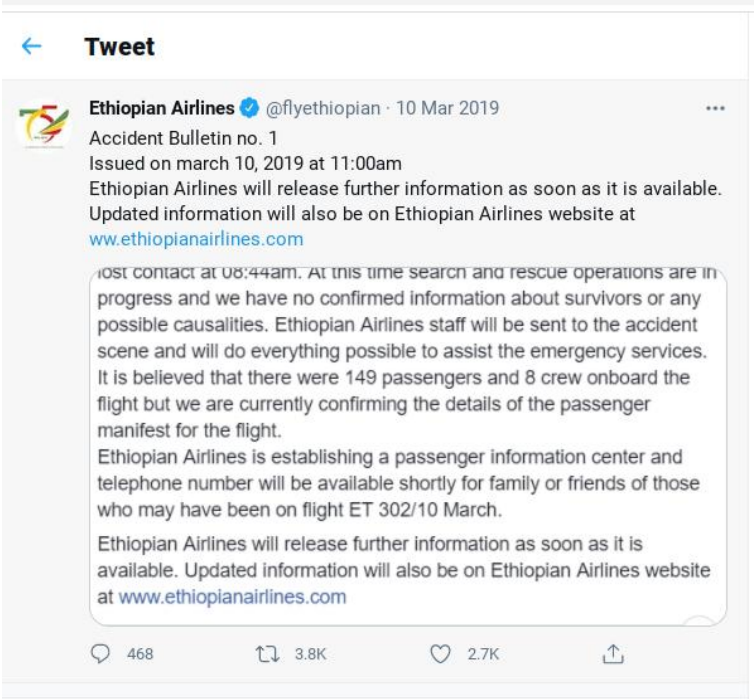


Figure 4.1: Ethiopian Airlines Most Retweeted Tweet

Interestingly, as much as people were searching for information, they were looking for the right information. This is demonstrated by figure 4.2 below which was the most liked tweet during the period of data analyzed. The tweet was a statement by Ethiopian Airlines on its disappointment by the wrong reporting done by international

media outlet New York Times. This finding supports the notion that Twitter can indeed be perceived by stakeholders to be an effective communication lead during crisis communication fulfilling the first objective.



Figure 4.2: Ethiopian Airlines Top favorited tweet

In its "Top Tweets" lists, Twitter gathers those tweets that were forwarded most frequently in a certain time period, in this case, the month of March 2019. On this basis, the study's analysis showed that 51% of tweets retweeted and 63.27% favorited tweets listed by Twitter Ethiopia's "Top Tweets" account (@toptweets_de) between 10 March 2019 and 31 March 2019. Representatives from the media accounted for a third of the "Top Tweets" (50%), and were thus the second largest group, just after ordinary citizens (42%).

Different types of recommendations can be found in tweets that link to news sites: To begin with, Twitter users can recommend news sites by linking to them or their articles. Second, editorial recommendations for news items (also known as editorial self-promotion) can be found on Twitter. Users can choose whether or not to add a link in their recommendation tweets. Posting a link does not necessarily mean that a

user endorses the linked article, actor, or event: users can post critical assessments of linked content or actors as well.

4.3.1 Attribution Theory Based crisis communication best practices

All victims and potential victims should be provided with instructing information, which includes recall information. They should also be provided with information about their specific needs and actions to support them. Add rationalization or excuse methods to the instructional response for crises with little or no attributions of crisis culpability. Add compensation or apology techniques to situations with strong attributions. Attacks on accusers are best reserved for hearsay or challenge crises.

The threat posed by a crisis can also be perceived as behavioral intentions. For instance, if an organization has a higher percentage of people who blame it for a crisis, this could affect their purchase intentions.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study in line with the study objectives. The chapter also provides how the theories inform the research findings. Lastly, recommendations for areas of further research are included at the end of the chapter.

5.2 Summary of Major Findings

In this section the study presents the summary of the findings based on the objectives of the study which were: To establish the perceived ease of use of Twitter for crisis management by looking at the Ethiopian airplane's crash case; To find out the facilitating conditions influencing the use of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines; To investigate the perceived usefulness of Twitter for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines; To evaluate the social influence of Twitter as used for crisis management by Ethiopian airlines.

5.2.1 Perceived ease of use of Twitter

Twitter as a social media platform is perceived to be easy to use if it's 192 million daily users are anything to go by. All a user requires is to set up an account and browse the platform according to their preferences and likes. For an organization, the process is also simple and easy. This is attributed to the fact that they do not need to keep a record of all the followers on their page unless a specific user reaches out to

them with a specific need. Furthermore, the availability of history of tweets and follower responses (such as those used as the source of data for this study), makes it possible for an organization to have a record of their customers' information (Dance, 2010). This information could be useful in two ways: for the positive comments, an organization is able to determine what people are saying about its brand, providing free advertising and marketing to other users. For the negative comments, businesses can use this to find product defects or dissatisfaction with services and correct such issues. Additionally, the keywords use, that is, hashtag feature, makes it easy for users to track the trending topics and engage discussions on a variety of topics. Ethiopian Airlines is seen to use the hashtag #flyethiopian after the accident bulletin posts in a bid to boost the image of the airline. Moreover, Twitter provides a user with the option to choose how he/she receives alerts such as by use of email messages, further making it easier for one to get information (Curran, O'Hara, & O'Brien, 2011).

5.2.2 Perceived usefulness of Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform that links users to other users and information depending on their personal interests. Users express their opinions in 140 characters called tweets and share photos and other media with their followers. Twitter (2019) currently has over 192 million registered users and 95 million tweets are shared per day.

Fearn (2015) asserts that social media is an effective method for monitoring and participating in two-way communication and is useful for emergency communications as information can be disseminated efficiently. The view that Twitter can facilitate communication between an organization and its stakeholders (daily users) does not mean that all companies are engaging in this. Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) assert that despite the fact that social networks give essential information and are simple to use,

they are not fully utilized primary tools. This study contributes to the understanding of the potential that social media, Twitter especially has as a communication tool for unpredictable events that threaten important expectations of stakeholders. The study also highlights that key stakeholders are still unsure of how to use social platforms for crisis management.

According to the analysis, Twitter can help an organization respond to a crisis by providing fast updates, engaging with stakeholders, and creating dialogue. This bolstered the argument that businesses should participate in two-way communication with stakeholders in order to shorten the duration and magnitude of crises.

5.2.3 Facilitating conditions for the use of Twitter

When looking into crisis communications and Twitter, it's possible to gain insight into how people use the social media network. According to Smith and Riggan (2013), users' interest in a topic is a key component in getting them to participate in Twitter conversations. However, his research focused on interactivity in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and while this places social media as a tool for crisis management, it may only be representative of extreme disasters rather than reputational risk. Users may be more interested in connecting to a community and representing an issue, than offering their own personal ideas (Smith, 2010).

Benefits and concerns about the value of Twitter as a crisis communication tool were identified. Twitter's pros include instant updates, involvement with stakeholders, and the establishment of discourse, but its drawbacks include misinformation, freedom of information demands, and the speed with which crises spread. The findings also imply that the effectiveness of Twitter as a crisis communication tool is contingent on the nature of the issue and the company. Individuals' motivations for utilizing Twitter have been recognized as obtaining real-time updates. However, because these worries

are about businesses' abilities to adapt to social media rather than problems with Twitter itself, it might be regarded as a useful communication strategy.

5.2.4 Social Influence for Twitter use

Social influence is defined as the manifestation of social impact that leads to a change of behavior after social interaction. Users on various social media platforms interact and influence each other in one way or another. These interactions are accompanied by motivation to share information. According to a survey conducted by New York Times Consumer Insight Group, one of the main reasons that people share information on social media is the desire to reveal valuable content to others. This point is well demonstrated in the data analysed for this study as the most retweeted tweet was accident bulletin one as shown in Figure 4.1. The bulletin included information confirming that an accident had happened as well as the number of people involved and the departure and arrival destinations for the airplane, all which were very crucial details for anyone who would have friends or relatives onboard.

Furthermore, Dance (2010) asserts that sharing is about getting people to see and respond to content and especially where there's a need for information such as in this case. What's more, Twitter's rapid growth since its inception in 2006 further enhances the influence that the platform has over its users, organizations being among them. Interestingly, Twitter has been found to be one of the most effective tools for breaking news (Curran, O'Hara, & O'Brien, 2011). Its real-time format is ideal for fast disseminating news and features like the retweet and trending services give content a boost. This allows customers to connect with an organization in real time, giving an opportunity for answers to queries. This could explain why Ethiopian Airlines chose to use Twitter as its primary source of information despite having more followers on Facebook.

5.3 Discussions

The findings of this study can be further understood through the eyes of UTAUT theory which explains the intent of use of a particular system. In this case, Twitter is being referred to as the system. Performance expectancy, one of the constructs of the theory explains that a person will use a system if it is deemed to be useful. Similarly, people will use Twitter for specific benefits. For individuals, Twitter may be used to be in the know and find out what's happening in the world in a matter of minutes. On the other hand, by using Twitter, organizations can monitor and influence conversations taking place. The Internet has changed relationships with stakeholders and PR practitioners need to recognize the increasing power of consumers (Merwe & Abratt, 2015). This view supports Lambert (PR Week, 2016) who commented that brands must embrace stakeholders and provide opportunities for personal interaction. The effort expectancy construct of this theory expounds this further by stating that people also review the ease or difficulty of using a system before using it. People will therefore choose which platform to use depending on how easy/difficult they find it. This highlights the need then for organizations to understand their key target audiences and where they get information.

The perceived ease of use construct is demonstrated in the high number of Twitter users using the platform on a daily basis as well as some features that make it easy to use such as the hashtag and trending feature as aforementioned. Without a doubt, Twitter as a social media platform has demonstrated to have social influence and social impact on issues such as crisis management in which this study investigates.

5.3.1 Crisis communication

Pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis communication are the three stages of crisis communication. Coombs (2007) describes crisis response and what the management of an organization does and says after a crisis has occurred. In other words, this is the type of communication that takes place during the earliest stages of a crisis response.

5.3.2 Crisis response

Three key guidelines have been proposed by Coombs (2007) for successful crisis response: be quick, accurate and consistent. It is mentioned that any news about a crisis should ideally be shared within an hour of the crisis event. This gives an organization the opportunity to take a lead with information flow and appear to be in control. There may not be full information about the crisis when it happens but acknowledging that something has happened, and information will be shared goes a long way in maintaining communication with stakeholders who are already looking for information from different sources. For instance, the very first tweet shared by Ethiopian Airlines after the accident was an acknowledgement that an accident has indeed occurred and that updates on what happened were to follow. Five more accident bulletins were shared on the airline's Twitter account on the date the accident happened letting people know details of the accident, which communication channels to check out for information and what actions have been put in place since the crisis event.



Figure 5.1 Screenshot of first tweet after crisis event

Figure 5.1 gives an example of quickness in communicating during a crisis. The tweet was shared 2 hours after the event happened. Ethiopian Airlines also lets stakeholders know that more information updates are expected and where to get the updates. Figure 5.1 also demonstrates the need to include information and trauma desks for passenger and crew families since the crisis resulted in deaths as suggested by (Coombs, 2007).

The second guideline suggests that accurate information on what happened and how it will affect stakeholders is important in crisis communication. The organization must appear to speak in one voice. This does not necessarily mean that one person only should speak on behalf of the company, rather, that everybody who communicates on behalf of the firm must send the same message.

Additionally, inaccurate statements shared by others about the crisis must be corrected to prevent a perception of incompetence. Figure 5.2 demonstrates this as they expressed regret when one of the popular media houses gave false information about the accident.

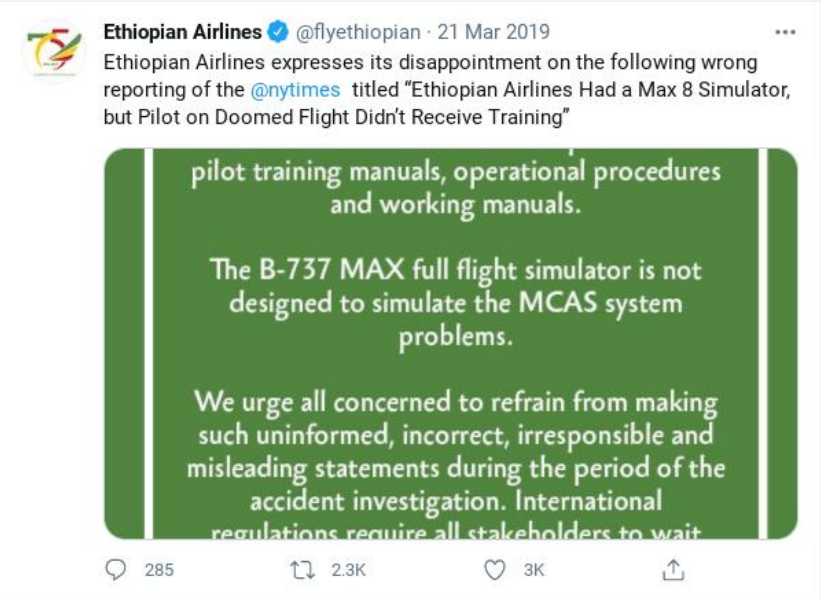


Figure 5.2 Screenshot refuting wrong reporting

Consistency, the last of the recommended guidelines, means that the organization should give frequent information updates about the situation. When the accident happened, Ethiopian Airlines issued five accident bulletins on the 10th including a press conference to give reporters a chance to ask questions. When the three guidelines are used together, they prevent an information vacuum and go a long way in upholding the reputation of an organization (Coombs, 2007).

5.3.3 Reputation repair strategies

Research denotes a variety of reputation strategies as used by crisis managers. Table 5.3 shows the different categories and how they are used.

Table 5.3: Crisis response strategies

	Category	Strategy	Description
Primary crisis response strategies	Deny	Attack the accuser	Crisis manager challenges a person/group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
		Denial	Crisis manager maintains there is no crisis.
		Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames some people/group outside of the organization for the crisis.
	Diminish	Excuse	Crisis managers lessen organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
		Justification	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
	Rebuild	Compensation	Crisis managers offer money / gifts to crisis victims.
		Apology	Crisis manager shows the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis event and seeks forgiveness from stakeholders.
Secondary crisis response strategies	Bolstering	Reminder	Stakeholders are told about the past good works of the organization.
		Ingratiation	The crisis manager praises and/or reminds stakeholders of the organization's previous positive works.
		Victimage	Organization plays victim to stakeholders.

Source: (Coombs, 2007)

Data analysis on the Twitter conversations revealed that the Ethiopian Airlines used strategies highlighted below in their responses.

1. Attack the accuser



Figure 5.3 Screenshot of Tweet sent on 21st March

During a crisis, it is likely that information will be shared from all corners, whether factual or false. The mandate to ensure that information shared is accurate falls on the organization itself. Figure 5.3 is an example of what an organization should do, should there be reports of circulation of misinformation.

2. Excuse

Figure 5.5 shows a tweet whereby the airline came out to denounce the notion that their pilots had not undergone the required training for flying the plane, insinuating that they were incompetent. By sharing this statement, the airline minimized the organization's responsibility by denying intent to do harm, that is, their pilots are highly trained to ensure safety of passengers and crew onboard.



Figure 5.4: Screenshot of Tweet sent on 21st March

3. Reminder

Some crisis managers choose to share positive messages of past or current good works by the firm to lessen the negativity experienced during a crisis. Interestingly, barely two weeks after the crisis event, Ethiopian Airlines won a continental award and did not shy away from sharing this with their followers on Twitter.



Figure 5.5 Screenshot of Tweet sent on 26th March

In addition to the strategies above, Dean (2004) recommends that crisis managers should express concern over victims involved in any crisis event. He adds that,

organizations that expressed concern experienced less reputational damage as compared to those who lacked an expression of concern altogether. Figure 5.5 shows Ethiopian Airlines expression of sympathy which the researcher can deduce to mean that by the mere fact of sharing the image, the airline suffered less reputational damage.

5.3.4 Attribution Theory

As previously stated, attribution theory states that people attempt to explain why events occur, particularly unexpected and unfavorable ones. The situation or the person in the scenario is held responsible for the incident. It is most likely that the blame will be on the organization or the situation if the crisis is deemed to be unfavorable.

It is impossible to talk about Attribution theory without mentioning Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) which grew from the former. Coombs and Holladay (2004) have identified different crisis types by attribution of crisis responsibility that have been used over a long period of time by crisis managers as posited by the two theories. In addition, the attribution theory gives further insights to this research by explaining that people will always be searching for the cause of events and make attributions of responsibility. This in turn makes individuals experience an emotional reaction to the event with anger and sympathy being the core emotions outlined by this theory. The findings show that the tweeps engaged with Ethiopian Airlines to find answers, sympathize with the affected and blame someone for the incident. Other parties tried to blame the pilots' lack of training for the accident, but the airline refuted those claims as figure 5.5 shows. Interestingly, a report published much later after the incident indicated that the blame should not be on the pilots, rather, on the

aircraft itself. This further asserts the need for organizations to know how to communicate when they do not have all the information about the incident. In the researcher's view, the airline should have given a statement saying investigations are ongoing and will give their comments after they are conclusive.

5.4 Conclusions

Crisis communication is a vital aspect of public relations which determines the failure and success of an organization. In a crisis prone industry like the airline industry, which is susceptible to public scrutiny and media interest, integrated crisis communication in the pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis phases foster relationships with stakeholders and provide a shield against negative corporate reputation in the event of a crisis.

Because emergency management entails more than the use of frameworks to inform and lead the public, there can be no guarantee that everyone is aware of the actions performed, which are communicated through many channels, including Twitter, during emergencies. Furthermore, Turoff et al. (2013) suggested that social media might not be as effective for effective collaboration as a system specifically created for crisis preparation and response. Understanding how social media (Twitter) can be integrated with planning and control systems in the back office is crucial for future development.

The findings add to the body of knowledge and make recommendations to organizations. Because social media and crisis management are relatively new aspects of public relations practice, the researcher has included some suggestions for further research below to give a more complete view.

5.5 Recommendations

It was found that Twitter can be very useful in communicating during a crisis. As such, the study recommends that, in the event of a crisis, corporations need to share messages on Twitter regularly about new developments and should not withhold information. If information is unavailable, they should release a short holding statement, so people understand that the company is aware and in control of the situation. In addition, it is mentioned that Twitter can be used to keep track of a company's brand and reputation, as well as hashtags and hot topics, in order to connect with stakeholders and promptly address misinformation and falsehoods. Moreover, the study advocates for the use of various media channels to share information based on where their target audiences are, as well as the quickest and fastest platform. Twitter has been noted to be a platform where information spreads like wildfire. Finally, the researcher proposes that firms should have a crisis communication plan prepared in advance, outlining which platforms will be used to communicate the problem as well as who will communicate on behalf of the organization.

5.6 Suggestions for future research

The aim of this study was to investigate the use of Twitter in crisis management while using the Ethiopian Airplane's crash in March 2019. The study endorses replication of the research study in other social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to facilitate comparison of research findings. Further research is also proposed on how proactiveness or reactiveness in use of Twitter affects a company and its image in the event of a crisis.

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APPENDIX A

CODEBOOK FOR CODE SHEET ONE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES TWEETS

This codebook includes instructions for code sheet one, which helped the researcher identify and answer questions regarding Ethiopian Airlines tweets.

Code Sheet One: Ethiopian Airlines Tweets

The researcher used this code sheet for each individual tweet sent by Ethiopian Airlines on their profile from 9.15 am on 10 March, 2019 to 8.23 am on 31 March, 2019.

1. Twitter ID - Type in the Twitter ID.
2. Time - Type in the date and time in the appropriate boxes.

- Date of post (DD.MM.YY).
- Time of post (time according to 24 hour clock system).

3. Exact text of tweet - Copy and paste the tweet in this section.
4. Link - When a link appears in the post, click the link. The researcher should post them and identify what the link is (company website, Facebook account) in the column next to the link. If there's no link, type in N/A.

- Post the link here _____
- What does it link to?

5. Platform where the post was tweeted - Type either web or third party application used to publish the tweet by the company. This is located by the date and time of the tweet "from…"

- TweetDeck
- Twitter Web App
- Twitter for Android
- Twitter Web Client

- Other

6. Four objectives of the study - The researcher will identify whether the tweet fits in one of the four objectives (perceived ease of use, facilitating conditions, perceived usefulness and social influence). Since the constructs can overlap, it's okay if more than one objective fits each tweet. Try to narrow it down to one objective if possible. Answer yes if the tweet matches the objective and no if it doesn't.

- Perceived ease of use - Type yes or no.
- Facilitating conditions - Type yes or no.
- Perceived usefulness - Type yes or no.
- Social influence - Type yes or no.

7. Thematic issues - The researcher will identify whether the tweet demonstrates the following thematic issues (brand promotion, crisis communication and news). Answer yes if the tweet aligns with the indicator and no if it does not.

- Brand promotion - Type yes or no

Posts that demonstrate the organization and its activities in good light, showcasing the benefits of the firm.

- Crisis communication - Type yes or no.

  Posts showing communication about the crisis event.

- News - Type yes or no.

  Posts that communicate about new occurrences for the organization.

8. Open-ended section - The researcher will use this section to post any additional comments he/she may have regarding the individual tweet. This section allows for more qualitative feedback. In addition, the coder should type what they feel the overall theme of the tweet is.

APPENDIX B

CODE SHEET ONE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES TWEETS

1. Twitter ID - Type in the Twitter ID.
2. Time - Type in the date and time in the appropriate boxes.

- Date of post
- Time of post

3. Exact text of tweet - (Copy and paste)
4. Link

- Post the link here _____
- What does it link to?

5. Platform where the post was tweeted

- TweetDeck
- Twitter Web App
- Twitter for Android
- Twitter Web Client
- Other

6. Four objectives of the study.

- Perceived ease of use - Type yes or no.
- Facilitating conditions - Type yes or no.
- Perceived usefulness - Type yes or no.
- Social influence - Type yes or no.

7. Thematic issues.

- Brand promotion - Type yes or no
- Crisis communication - Type yes or no.
- News - Type yes or no.

8. Open-ended section

- Comments

APPENDIX C

Schedule of Activities

Task	Month Number							
	Jan-March 2019	**April - July 2019**	**Aug-Sep 2019**	**Oct 2019**	**Nov 2019**	**Dec 2019-Feb 2021**	**April - May 2021**	**June-July 2021**
Development of the concept and approval								
Drafting of the proposal								
Submission of research proposal to postgraduate department.								
Preparation of presentation for oral defence								
1st Oral defence								
Comments from the supervisors, and defence								
Addressing the school corrections and pilot testing of the instrument								
Application of NACOSTI letter								
Comments from the supervisors, and defence. Addressing corrections								
Field work, data collection and analysis								
Drafting of the final project and submission								
2nd Oral Defence								

APPENDIX D

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RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms.. Judy Wangari Mbugua of Saint Paul University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic: The use of twitter in crisis management: a case of the Ethiopian airlines crash Boeing 737 8 flight ET302 10th March, 2019 for the period ending : 16/April/2022.

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APPENDIX E

Approval Letter

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28th October 2019

Judy Wangari Mbugua
MACSNRB919218

BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Dear Judy,

RE: **DISSERTATION SUPERVISION 2019/2020 ACADEMIC YEAR**

Congratulations for completing the first year of coursework in your postgraduate studies. The Board of Postgraduate Studies has approved your dissertation concept which is entitled: **"Social media as a tool of corporate communication in crisis communication". Dr. Winnie Ndeta** has been appointed as the lead supervisor and **Dr. Geoffrey Serede** as the co-supervisor for your research and they shall guide you as you write your dissertation. The supervision is to commence on **28th October 2019.** Kindly note the following as you carry out your research:-

(i) You will first contact the lead supervisor who will then forward the work to the co-supervisor for additional input/ advice.
(ii) The role of the supervisors is to guide you in writing the proposal, doing the research, and writing the whole dissertation in accordance with the terms laid down in the dissertation handbook
(iii) You should agree with your supervisors on the most appropriate supervision schedule and process
(iv) Ensure that your supervisors fill in the supervisor's form and submit a copy to the postgraduate office
(v) You are expected to follow the procedures laid down in the dissertation handbook if you are dissatisfied with the supervision process.
(vi) Supervision meetings should not take place in private premises.
(vii) It is your responsibility to ensure that you defend your research proposal in your department. Consult the HOD for the appropriate date to do so.
(viii) Constantly refer to the dissertation handbook in all matters pertaining to the dissertation.
(ix) Your proposal and final dissertation must be processed through turn it in. Open an account with the help of the ICT department in your campus then get log in details from your supervisor.
(x) The deadline for submitting proposals is **28th February 2020.**

The complete dissertation should be handed in on or before **31st May 2020**. The postgraduate studies office will send you a softcopy of the dissertation handbook for use. (update the office of your current email and telephone address).

We wish you all the best as you do your research.

Regards,

Dr. Sammy Githuku
Director, Postgraduate Studies

copy: Dean,
Head of Department