

**ONLINE DEBATES DURING CRISIS: THE CASE OF TWITTER USE DURING THE
2019 HUMAN BODY DROPPING FROM AIRCRAFT AT HEATHROW**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research is my own work and it has not been presented to any other University for an academic award.

Sign..... Date.....

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This research has been submitted with my approval as the University Supervisor.

Sign..... Date.....

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty my source of inspiration, knowledge and understanding.

To my daughter Amor who has been affected in every possible way by this quest, I love you. I also dedicate this project to my family. A special gratitude to my loving parents Peter and Rose Omedo whose words of encouragement are still ringing in my ears. My brothers and sisters, Nancy, Eva, Leakey, Cliff who never left my side.

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ACRONYMS

API: Application Programming Interface

KQ: Kenya Airways

MAD: Median Absolute Deviation

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

U&G: Uses and Gratification

URL: Uniform Resource Locator

ABSTRACT

This study presents an evaluation of online debate during crisis with specific focus on the use of Twitter during 2019 human body dropping from an aircraft at Heathrow Airport. The study aimed at three objectives which were: to find out the dynamics of Twitter debates during crisis, find out how the crisis involving a human body dropping off a plane at Heathrow was debated on Twitter and to find out the effectiveness of Twitter as a communication platform during the crisis. The assessment is based on a data set obtained from 3,000 tweets over a period of 10 days. Content analysis was used to make sense of the data. Findings suggest a heavily distorted activity distribution among users that favor a small core comprising of five groups with varying patterns of use. Looking at Twitter as a platform for online debates during crisis, the researcher concludes that even though Twitter's impact is very small, it nevertheless comes across as a critical platform for engaging in online debates during crisis situation. The recommendation is that Twitter as a new media platform be considered as a catalyst for debates on diverse matters including crisis. However, there is need to further conduct in-depth analysis of Twitter as an online platform for debates during crisis situation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Within this chapter, the background to this research is provided including problem statement, study objectives, research questions, study rationale and its significance. It also outlines the extent and limitations of the research.

1.1 Background to the study

On 2 July 2019, a body which was believed to be of a man fell off the sky and landed at a spot along Offerton Road some few kilometers from Heathrow Airport in London, UK. The fall of the body was witnessed by a plane spotter tracking the flight on an application from London (BBC, 2019). The person fell from an airplane from Nairobi identified as Kenya Airways KQ100. The incident was picked up by all major news outlets in the United Kingdom, generating a lot of online debate particularly in Twitter. Today, social media has emerged to be a major platform for public discourse with more than hundreds of millions of people sharing their opinions and thoughts on the platform. This study aims at assessing online debates during crisis, specifically about the human body that dropped at Heathrow in 2019.

It is important to know what is meant by a crisis before focusing on the nature of online debates during crisis. Crisis as a term has been defined by scholars in the field of communication. FearnBanks (1996) defined a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organisation, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good name” (p.1). Besides this meaning, Stamsnijder (2002) defines crisis as a situation characterised

by emergency or an expected event having far reaching tangible and intangible consequences on those involved (p.3). The most significant feature in defining a crisis according to Muller et al. (2001) is that it is an uncertain, unpredictable threat that demands urgent action. These crisis definitions share a number of common features. These include the element of surprise, impending threat situation and urgency for swift response.

Within the public domain, crisis encompasses incidences resulting in death, injuries or an event threatening social, political or economic disruption. Apart from these forms of crises, some crises are not a threat to life but threaten critical social values. Instances of crisis in the public domain are riots, terrorist attack, wars and significant transport accidents. The damages brought about by these crises are wide ranging and these can be economic, psychological or physical (Malone and Coombs, 2009, p.121). The case of human body that dropped at Heathrow qualifies as a crisis scenario based on the characteristics of a crisis defined previously.

The public have a right to information particularly during crisis so that they can be aware of what is going on. This information must be provided by the authorities. Communication is critical in this sense since it keeps the public and all parties involved with the accurate and complete information about the crisis. The main purpose of communicating a crisis event is to effectively minimise and prevent harm or possible death or to enable individuals to recover from shock associated with the crisis. There are three objectives for communicating crisis to minimise the intensification of a crisis. Interpretation or meaning is the first objective and this concerns providing accurate information about the meaning of the crisis for the victims and the public. It is important in this case to consider the way in which the victims feel, if at all alive, and to reflect

the society's feelings. Part of this is expression of compassion. The provision of adequate information is the second objective. This involves letting the public know what has transpired and still transpiring at that moment. For instance, informing the public about the steps being taken by the authorities and the reasons behind some decisions. Harm reduction is the third and final objective of communicating crisis.

Given the above perspectives on crisis, it is within the scope of this study to link these with Twitter. Twitter has introduced the possibility for everyone to provide other people with news and information by posting messages, videos and photos. Given this possibility, people become sources of online information with individuals no longer being considered as mere consumers of information but instead becoming contributors. This is referred to as user-generated media.

The emergence and growth of new forms of media has led to significant impacts on the way in which crisis is communicated. Today, the emergence of social media is playing a significant and essential function in crisis communication (Schultz et al., 2011). The way in which crisis is being communicated has been offered a new perspective by Twitter. This perspective is founded on the idea that while citizens are provided with information by the authorities, that are also active participants in collecting information from the citizens by turning to social media. The implication is that the public and the authorities can interact with one another, thanks to Twitter, where they can offer one another information in the fastest way and rumours can be confirmed at the initial stages. Through this, news coverage of an incident can be influenced by the authorities through these platforms (NCC, 2010).

Apart from making interaction between the authorities and the public possible, Twitter also functions to realise the aims of crisis communication which are the provision of information, harm reduction and providing meaning. The platform may also function of offering information or can guide information seekers ion where to turn to when they require more information to ensure that they receive accurate and correct information. The platform can also assist in minimising the potential harm caused by the crisis by acting as a warning system, providing an action plan or supporting rescue operations through information exchange. Beside this, the platform can suggest a situation, for instance, by witness testimonies being uploaded on the platform for sharing. Twitter also promotes the three crisis communication principles of honesty, openness and swiftness. A target group can be effectively and efficiently reached through the platform.

1.1.1 Popularity of Twitter as a Communication Platform

Twitter was initially an all-text platform in which users could compose tweets on the platform's online interface. The functions of the platform underwent a transformation such that users were no longer limited to texts only (Kumar, 2015). Today, it is now possible to upload diverse contents such as pictures, videos, advertisements and links. The platform uses reverse chronological order to display content in a user's feed. The platform can be used by a user to contact other users through direct messaging. Tweets can contain up to 140 characters. This kind of micro blogging makes it possible for users to discuss diverse issues and topics with people around the globe speedily in comparison to other forms of regular blogging. According to Java, Song, Finin and Tseng (2007), the short posts minimise time demands and thought investments.

A survey conducted in the first quarter of 2017 by Statistica (2017) reported that active users per month were approximately 328 million compared to 319 million in the fourth quarter of 2016. Kenya has witnessed a rapid increase in the use of Twitter since 2012. Kenyans are also ranked the most active people on social media (Bakers, 2013). Twitter is however not the most popular social media platform even though it has distinctive characteristics that are advantageous. Moreover, as stated by Parmar (2015), Twitter is the most transparent social media platform.

There are ways in which conversation flows between Twitter members. This is aided by specific capabilities such as tweeting, replying, retweeting, liking and messaging. These actions are available to all users. Twitter users are capable of responding to other users' tweets. Other users can also be mentioned beforehand without necessarily responding to anything. This is referred to as "tagging" or "mentioning".

Retweeting is when a user reposts a tweet originally published by another user. The tweet is reposted by a user to his or her feed through retweeting. In other words, a tweet by a user is shared by another user with his followers. It is through retweeting that content becomes viral, meaning that the content is shared by many users across the platform. This mechanism of distributing content can harm a brand such as the United Airline's incident in which a passenger was seriously mishandled by the airline staff. The incident was recorded by other passengers and uploaded on social media. The incident's original tweet attracted more than 23,000 retweets just 72 hours after the incident (Yan, Zdanowich and Emanuella, 2017). This is an instance in which twitter has been used share information about a particular incidence.

1.1.2 Crisis Communication in Twitter

There are three fundamental features of a crisis (King, 2002). The first feature is that a crisis is an unplanned event which can potentially wreck both the internal and external composition of an organisation. Secondly, it can take place at any given moment. Thirdly, it can impact on an organisation's legitimacy. According to Coombs (2011), the purpose of managing a crisis is to put in place strategies that can counter every negative impact of an action or event which is deemed to be damaging to the credibility or reputation of a company or individual. The causes of a crisis can be either intentional or unintentional. They can arise from within the organisation or from the outside.

According to Coombs (2011), the overarching objective of crisis management is to minimise or prevent the undesirable consequences of a crisis. Communication relayed to customers and stakeholders of an organisation prior to, during and after a crisis have occurred is critical to crisis management (Fearn-Banks, 2007). There are many stakeholders in the airline industry and as such, the companies must be accountable to them. The information available to these stakeholders, particularly those that have been communicated by the airline during a crisis situation is often of great importance in determining the way in which the situation affects the stakeholders. During the process of managing a crisis, the most critical consideration is the manner in which the company manages its response to ensure consistent and accurate messaging (Coombs, 1999). Ogrizek and Guillary (1999), for example, note that some incidents are "neither disasters nor major risk situations, but the media gave them a scale that triggered the outbreak that was without a doubt the root of the crisis" (p. 14).

Researchers have recently started to investigate how social media is being used during crisis. The focus of these investigations has been on the way in which Twitter is utilised during natural calamities. These studies (e.g. Hughes and Palen, 2009; Starbird and Palen, 2010; Starbird and Palen, 2011) suggest that the major uses of Twitter by citizens during crisis are mainly information sharing, expression of emotions and opinions and supporting those in need of aid. Such information that is being shared on Twitter and other social media platforms are very important to companies during crisis since it can be used in updating situational awareness and enhance their operational reaction to the crisis.

Social media discourse in emergency situations is co-created by citizens, response organisations and others. The intention, personality and motives of individual users drive their behaviour in social media (Anderson, 2011; Wang, 2012; Wybo et al., 2015). Being an eyewitness of a crisis event has considerable potential to engage people in interaction via social media (Zhang and Vos, 2014). Such messages may spread widely, especially via Twitter, which lacks gatekeeping and can thus disseminate issues rapidly via its large user base (Hughes and Palen, 2009; Pang et al., 2014). ‘Twitter Journalism’ also seems to offer the stamp of public approval when accompanied with live images (Tam, 2012), for which reason news media monitor Twitter for confirmation of breaking news (Terdiman, 2014). Other motives for engaging in social media during crisis events are seeking information or assistance, but also telling others that one is okay, sharing grief and emotional support, expressing criticisms and co-creating solutions. As the trend towards the usage of social or real-time media strengthens, it also adds to the speed with which crisis events develop. Consequently, understanding the way in which information spreads in the online environment is important in crisis situations (Zhang and Vos, 2015).

Cascading refers to a message being passed to a first group of receivers who in turn pass it on to the next, igniting further explosions of information. Simple cascading has been contested in studies that have pointed to the existence of thresholds and have suggested that the widening diffusion of information would be better explained as triggered by a collision of shorter chains of communication (Rogers et al., 2012). This line of thinking has also led to studies investigating the role of weak links in passing messages on to other groups of users (Zhao et al., 2010). The concept of viral spreading suggests that online diffusion can be compared to the spread of a contagious disease, and has led to studying the ‘infection time’ of users in social media. It has been suggested that influential users, for example popular bloggers, can facilitate the process through which messages go viral. How often a message is passed on over time has been shown in frequency graphs, in line with the diffusion of innovation theory proposed by Rogers (1995). The diffusion of online messages is assumed to die out after a while. Similarly, issues that are discussed online are also expected, after showing growth, to decay at some point. Put differently, different issues arise and compete for attention, some becoming hot topics while others quickly fade. To be able to deal with an evolving crisis situation, the results of monitoring need to support understanding of complex issue patterns.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The existence of social media platforms such as Twitter has meant that communication and the flow of information has been greatly enhanced and this portends significant challenge in determining the accuracy of information particularly during crisis situation. Moreover, there have been several online debates during crisis even though very few scholars have attempted to investigate how such debates progress in twitter. Additionally, no scientific study has been

conducted on the incident involving human body dropping from an aircraft at Heathrow Airport. Therefore, this study seeks to scientifically study online debates which progressed during the human body dropping from an aircraft at Heathrow. Given that Twitter enables the public to talk to one another without the content of such talks being verified, it potentially creates new challenges in terms of acquiring honest information on incidences.

1.3 Study Objectives

This study's general objective is to investigate online debates during crisis. The specific objectives are:

- a) To find out the dynamics of Twitter debates during crisis.
- b) To find out how the crisis involving a human body dropping off a plane at Heathrow was debated on Twitter.
- c) To find out the effectiveness of Twitter as a communication platform during the crisis.

1.4 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) How was the crisis involving a human body dropping at Heathrow debated on Twitter?
- b) What were the dynamics of Twitter debates about the human body dropping off?
- c) How was Twitter used during the crisis?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Twitter emerged to be among the most widely used social media platforms in the world. As such, its value as a public communication platform cannot be underestimated. The rationale of the

present study lied in the fact that it would contribute critical data and knowledge of the extent to which it is utilised during crisis.

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are several categories of people who will benefit from the outcome of this study in various ways. First, the researcher has gained knowledge on how debates are conducted in Twitter during a crisis situation. This is significant because Twitter has emerged to become among the most widely utilised social media platforms. The study is also critical for crisis communication managers who have a vibrant online presence. It is also important to students of communication who will use the findings to inform their studies. It will also contribute literature on Twitter and crisis communication.

1.7 Scope and limitations of the Study

This research focused on online debates during crisis with specific focus on the human body that dropped at from an aircraft at Heathrow. The study was limited to Twitter.

There are circumstances and factors that affected the conduct of the study. These circumstances and factors may affect the reliability of the study and hence there is need for further research. Among the limitations encountered were time and resources. The schedule for submission and the fact that the researcher also works on other engagements made it difficult to dedicate a larger percentage of time to the project. However, the researcher made use of every available opportunity to focus on the project. The study is also self sponsored and hence there were inadequate resources to broaden the research.

1.8 Operational Terms

Crisis: a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organisation, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good name

Debate: a process of engaging in formal or informal argument about a subject or incident.

Human body: remains of a dead person.

Online: an activity conducted through computer network.

Twitter: a web application in which users could compose tweets on the platform's online interface.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

In this section, the theoretical framework guiding this study is discussed. It further reviews literature on online debates and crisis communication in order to find out the trend in studies on the subject. The way that Twitter is used and the views about its significance during crisis are discussed. It considers empirical studies that demonstrate the way in which various media channels is used and viewed differently among various groups whenever there is a crisis.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

There is one theory relevant to the understanding of the use of social media platforms and their benefits. This is the Uses and Gratification theory proposed by Blumler, Katz and Gurevich. According to Weiyang (2015), any attempt at speculating on the direction of mass communication theory must seriously consider including the Uses and Gratification approach. The significance of the theory, he asserts, has been revived due to the emergence and growth of computer-mediated technology. In both practical and theoretical terms, the fundamental question remains why individuals get engrossed on a specific kind of mediated communication or another, and the kinds of gratification they obtain from it. Twitter has entered the daily lives of people with amazing swiftness to become a critical social platform for computer mediated communication (Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga, 2010). Uses and Gratification Theory is among the successful theoretical frameworks for assessing the questions of “how” and “why” people use media to satisfy specific needs (Karimi et al., 2014). According to Herzog (1944) and McGuire (1974), Uses and Gratification Theory (U&G) has been successful in comprehending the motivations and

behaviours of consumers within the context of traditional media such as TV and Radio (cited in Eighmey and MacCord, 1998). The framework has been applied to new media by recent studies.

Attention of researchers has been drawn to the extension and use of social networking sites such as Twitter, resulting in diverse studies focusing on the uses and social impacts of social networking sites. As such, U&G theory is being used by researchers to explain what makes new forms of media such as Twitter to be more enticing, what motivates users to join the sites and the gratification obtained from continuous use. The application of U&G theory to the study of Twitter is important since social media is relatively new.

2.2 Evolution of Uses and Gratification Theory

Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch pioneered the Uses and Gratification Theory in 1974. But according to McQuail (2010), the theory could be traced from the early 1940's when researchers started investigating why people listen to popular radio programmes and why they read newspapers daily. Therefore, the theory emerged in response to the needs of explanation to why people use certain media and the benefit they get from them. Mass communication researchers are using the U & G Theory to examine, explain, and provide answers to why people use certain media and what benefits or gratifications they get after that. The basic assumption of this theory is that people use mass media for different reasons and seek to derive various gratifications (Gallion, 2010; Wimmer and Dominick, cited in Asemah; 2011). However, the emergence of social media technologies changes the way people use mass media as they differ in forms and context.

Therefore, people who use social networks and other computer mediated communications are quite different from the mainstream media audiences who relied on specific media contents (Li, 2005). Social media audiences have the advantage and freedom to actively seek for information and many messages that are of interest and benefit to them. New media technologies did not only alter the way information is gathered and distributed but also changes the existing relationship between mass media and their audiences. Li (2005) stated that people use social media to satisfy their needs which include cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, tension release needs, and medium appeal needs. For this, social media become a fertile research field demonstrating the direct relevance of the U & G Theory and its participants (Matei, 2010).

In order to understand audiences' motivations and behaviours, the U&G theory has been divided into two major parts. In the first part, researchers have argued the factors that can predict motivations for media usage. Several researchers have addressed motivations for using media by applying demographic factors such as income, education, age (Cho et al., 2003; Choi, Kim, & McMillan, 2009) and psychological context (Fahr & Boecking, 2005; Hausman & Siekpe, 2009).

Researchers then focus on understanding the audiences' behaviour and motivation. Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass (1973) clarified that their motivations to consume media are derived from five specific needs: (a) Cognitive needs, which is related to "strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding" (p. 167); (b) Affective needs that is related to "strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience" (p. 167); (c) Integrative needs which is to "strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status" (p. 167); (d) Social integrative needs

which relates to “strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world” (p. 167); and (e) Escape or tension release needs which helps to escape or release tension from society and self.

Therefore, the Uses and Gratification Theory is an ideal theory to identify and analyse the online debates during crisis an example of the body that dropped from an aircraft at Heathrow Airport in London. Furthermore, applying the U & G Theory in social media studies is of great importance because these new forms of mass media such as Twitter are somewhat new in relation to old media. Unlike the traditional media that provided users with limited choices, these new media come up with new options and the theory will assist to explain the needs and gratification achieved by users (Gallion, 2010; Matei, 2010). As there are limited studies in Kenya to revalidate the U & G Theory in relations with social media, therefore, this study intends to apply the U & G Theory to help explain the online debates that went on during the body that dropped from an aircraft at Heathrow Airport in London.

2.3. Use of Twitter during Crisis

Research investigating the use of Twitter and its usefulness during times of crisis is rare. However, some studies have considered the subject from a general communication perspective. for instance, Schultz, Utz, and Georitz (2011) in their study of Twitter as a communication platform show that the kind of media, whether new or traditional, has message delivery being more significant than the content of the message itself particularly when it comes to developing positive perceptions among those who the message are meant. They continue to remark that even though the public still debate about newspaper articles, twitter has more positive effect on the way crisis is communicated and responded to. The researchers concluded that communicating a

crisis through Twitter resulted in mild negative responses compared to blogs and newspaper articles.

Apart from this study, Utz, Schultz and Glocka (2013) demonstrated that communicating a crisis in Twitter seemed to be more authentic and results to less crisis responses compared to communicating through traditional news media. This study was based on an experiment online which was associated with the Fukushima nuclear accident. The effects of using Twitter were highlighted by the study. According to the researchers, communicating the crisis during the nuclear disaster through social media led to enhanced reputation and mild secondary crisis responses compared to communicating the same through an online newspaper.

Other scholars have also researched the interaction between traditional and social media as the starting point for communicating crisis. For instance Liu, Austin and Jin have come up with what they are referring to as social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) in a number of investigations that are associated. This model is based on empirical analyses of the value of different channels of communication such as word of mouth, social and traditional media, as well as other third party sources of communication such as crisis management organisations in relation to activities associated with crisis. A common conclusion in these researches when compared to those conducted by Schiltz and colleagues (2011), Utz et al. (2013) is that a stronger influence on the way the public communicate crisis is exerted by traditional media, particularly in comparison tom other forms of media.

Another research carried out by the team demonstrated that social media are fundamentally used during instances of crisis to find special ‘insider information’ and to ensure that one is in contact with family and friends. On the other hand, traditional media which possess higher levels of credibility are in most cases utilised for gathering facts and offering information on the incident (Austin et al., 2012).

Palen et al. (2010) researched the way in which citizens utilized Twitter as a source of information during a crisis in which Minnesota and North Dakota in 2009. Their research showed the way in which information dissemination via social media during this incident profoundly affected the information offered by the relief agencies, media and the authorities. The study found that the citizens used Twitter for re-circulating official information and to offer eyewitness accounts from individuals who were in close proximity to the incident.

Research conducted on how Twitter was used during the flood that hit South East Queensland in 2011 reported the same findings. During the crisis, many Twitter users devoted themselves almost entirely to retweeting messages about the floods hence serving the role of amplifying information by the agencies involved in managing the incident and broadening their reach (Bruns et al., 2012). Considering the flooding incident, Bruns et al. (2012) discovered that Twitter was particularly used in looking for and distributing information as demonstrated by the large number of links and retweets.

Qu et al. (2011) also found that Sina-Weibo, a system of microblogging, served as an information source during the 2010 China earthquake where users got updated on the incident, received emotional support, express opinion and to mobilise for action. Similar results were also found by Shklovski, Palen, and Sutton (2008) during the Southern California wildfires. These results indicate that Twitter was mainly use as a platform for exchanging and sourcing information. They also assumed that the platform was used to support people at risk to better handle the distressing situation given the constancy and relevance of information provided on Twitter which cannot be gotten from traditional media.

Retweet behaviour was evaluated by Starbird and Palen (2010) during two natural crises in the US. They discovered that people who live in close proximity to the events were prone to retweeting locally relevant information while the rest of the public retweeted what can be considered to be general information.

Kogan, Palen, and Anderson (2015) reported the same retweet pattern while investigating the way in which information is diffused during the 2012 Hurricane Sandy incident. During the event, individuals who were close to the incident location retweeted more information when the disaster occurred than before or after with a bias toward locally developed, locally critical and information that can be acted upon. These locals further established solid networks of disseminating information during the event compared to prior to and after the incident occurred. Bruns and Stieglitz (2012) discovered numerous comments and direct mentions, reference to active discussion and opinion exchanges within the context of political crisis.

Reports have also demonstrated a critical amount of links and retweets which the authors have described as “gatewatching und news-sharing activities” (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2012, p. 176). Weick (1993) while studying the Mann Gulch fire disaster in 1949 emphasised the value of activities that made sense in the context of crisis. They categorised the sources of group resilience into four: “improvisation and bricolage, virtual role systems, the attitude of wisdom, and respectful interaction (p. 638). Continuous communication during crisis functions as a source of coordination while panic is moderated by virtual or non-virtual intergroup dynamics thereby affecting survival positively.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter describes the research method used in investigating online debates during crisis with a focus on the use of twitter during the crisis involving a human body that dropped within kilometers to landing in Heathrow Airport. The research philosophy underlying the study, study design, study location and target population will be described including the sampling technique, sample size, methods of data collection and the research procedures.

3.1 Study Site

The researcher chose to use Twitter as the main study site for various reasons. As a social media platform, Twitter is an open space which facilitates network analysis. Twitter also makes it possible for one to conduct chronological evaluation of the way debate develops from the first tweet on a given incident or crisis. Additionally, Twitter allows for easy identification of agenda setter or influencers in a discussion or debate.

Any analysis of Twitter must take into account the issue of representativeness in relation to participants and content. These include determining who is actually publishing in the platform, the category of society represented, the breadth of positions reflected on the platform, and the extent to which the debates represent other debates on the issue. While such concerns are justified, they are not very significant to the objective and purpose of this research as it claims representation only in the manner in which the human body dropping incident was discussed on Twitter. However, the analysis of the crisis suggests that the content that spread appeared to be much wider than expected.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted an interpretive approach given that the researcher's analysis is important in the process. As such, the researcher attempted to give meaning to the data obtained and to account for the observations made through description and analysis.

3.3 Research Approach

In order to extensively address the research questions, the researcher chose the mixed method research design. Initially, the researcher applied content analysis given that it enables statements concerning the Twitter content on the incident to be made representatively and retrospectively.

3.3.1 Research Method –Case Study

The case study that the researcher chose was the case of human body that drop from the aircraft in London Heathrow. The online debate the issue trended for a while.

3.4 Target Population

The statistical target population for the study was defined as the number of Tweets that were harvested during the 10 day period of between 1st June and 10th June when the falling of the human body from an aircraft generated debate on Twitter.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

3.5.1 Sample size

Given the goal of putting together a manageable sample size from the period of the crisis debate, data was downloaded and archived for a 10 day period from July 1st when the incident occurred

until July 10. The dataset comprised more than 900 tweets. The data was manually checked to eliminate bots and irregularities, generating 734 tweets addressing the incident in the final set.

3.5.2 Sampling Procedures

Stratified random sampling of tweets spanning the 10 day period was selected in order to minimise the amount of tweets, coming to a data volume of 975 tweets for the period. From this, the researcher retrieved data concerning the date of publishing the tweet, the name of the user, complete text and link, total amount of followers, description and location. From the entire data set, the researcher chose the 13th for analysis. The content analysis included tweets that only had a comprehensible English sentence. In total, 75 tweets were thoroughly analysed.

3.6 Data Collection Methods and Tools

Data collection was undertaken using a free online tool MAXQDA. The tool retrieves particular content, mines data and archives it in a form that can be easily interpreted. A code-book was also used as data collection tool once all the data had been retrieved.

A key informant interview guide was also used to collect information from Kenya Airways staff working in the communication department. The schedule consisted of a series of open ended questions. As such, the participants provided responses in a narrative format and this made it possible for the researcher to find out more about the airline's general communication protocol.

3.7 Data analysis and Presentation

The researcher hand-coded the data into various interest categories. The first part of the codebook considered formal criteria including date so as to discover more concerning the

potential transformation in twitter communication over time. Given that the form of communication and content often overlap, classes on both these dimensions were included.

Quantitative analysis of the data was initially conducted to provide insight into the way user activity was distributed and to search for activity patterns among the main publishers across various communication modes. Through making a comparison of the activities of those who published the majority of the tweets, the researcher aimed to capture the disparities in public communication function concerning the crisis. As such, activities of the leading 10 users in the data were categorised using five parameters. These were the number of tweets, replies sent, replies received, sent retweets and received retweets. The outcome of this contrast generated a pool of 12 core tweeters.

In order to validate the results of correspondence in Twitter activity, the researcher used the data as a doorway for conducting qualitative assessment of the pool comprising of the 12 core users. The major features were identified based on how they represented themselves in their user profiles and where possible, links to other online personal blogs, social networking sites, among others. The data also functioned as a doorway for qualitative research in the sense that the researcher utilised particular tweets, how they were distributed among the users together with public discourse between the major users as instances to illustrate the various kinds of activity. Considered together, these ideas were utilised in suggesting the five categories of the main users. The categories do not include all Twitter users. For example, individuals and other users who utilise the platform purely as an information source were excluded from the discussion. The categories are not intended to be comprehensive of the overall tweeting of the selected users. Instead, the groups focus on the main users and are meant to be an analytical tool highlighting

the disparities. The idea is to highlight the major features of the crisis and how Twitter functions as a sphere for public debates during crisis.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The study was duly authorised by the University of Nairobi. A certificate of field work was offered for the conduct of the research (see appendix 111). The researcher also interviewed key informants from Kenya Airways which implied entering into their personal realms of individual preferences and values in order to collect data. This raised a number of ethical issues which I was aware of. They included informed consent and honesty in data presentation, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. In this regard, participants were informed of the nature, purpose, methods of data collection and the degree of the study before commencement. Roles were also explained to those involved. The researcher then obtained a certificate of originality and a certificate of corrections that ascertains that the study is up to standard (see appendix IV and appendix V)

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0. Overview

In this chapter, the data is presented, analysed and interpreted. The researcher will relate the results to the principles of participating in the public domain. A closer consideration at the individuals who are viewed to comprise the core users will complement the insights gotten from quantitative analysis and an assessment of the user groups. This closer assessment will encompass key features including how the users were involved in the debate.

4.1. Interview Results

Five (5) Kenya Airways employees were interviewed, 2 males and 3 females from the communications department. Their age range was between 21 and 45 years with the majority having worked for the airline for more than 2 years. All the respondents indicated that Twitter is an important communication platform for the airline given that the airline can respond to enquiries and reach its clients faster.

For instance, the response from one of the respondents is as follows:

“Twitter is an important communication platform used by Kenya Airways. It is mostly used to inform our clientele on an incident that has occurred. I found out about the incident involving the human body that fell from an aircraft in Heathrow through Twitter. There were heated online debates about the incident which trended for a while and caught my attention.”

Another respondent mentioned:

“Twitter is used by the airline to relay information. However, the company is careful not to publish any information that may be damaging to its reputation. For example, the incident involving the human body that dropped was not published on the company’s Twitter page.

Another respondent indicated:

Twitter is important for Kenya Airways given that it provides a faster way for communicating with clients. The medium is also used to minimise panic especially when there is a crisis situation, it provides information on the steps being taken by the company to curb the situation

All the interviewees also indicated that Kenya Airways mainly uses Twitter to inform its clients whenever there is crisis and also to express concern and empathy in case the incident involves loss of lives or casualties. As such, the platform enables Kenya Airways to constantly update their followers on a crisis situation and what the company is doing about it. One respondent indicated that the platform is used by the company to reiterate their support for friends and families of victims and to inform them of the available support and help.

All the respondents were aware of the Heathrow body incident. Interestingly, all of them got to know about the incident from their colleagues. More specifically, they indicated that they learned about the incident from the cabin crew who were working on flight KQ100 when the incident happened. However, two of the respondents indicated that they searched twitter and other social networking sites to find out more information about the incident and how others were tweeting about it.

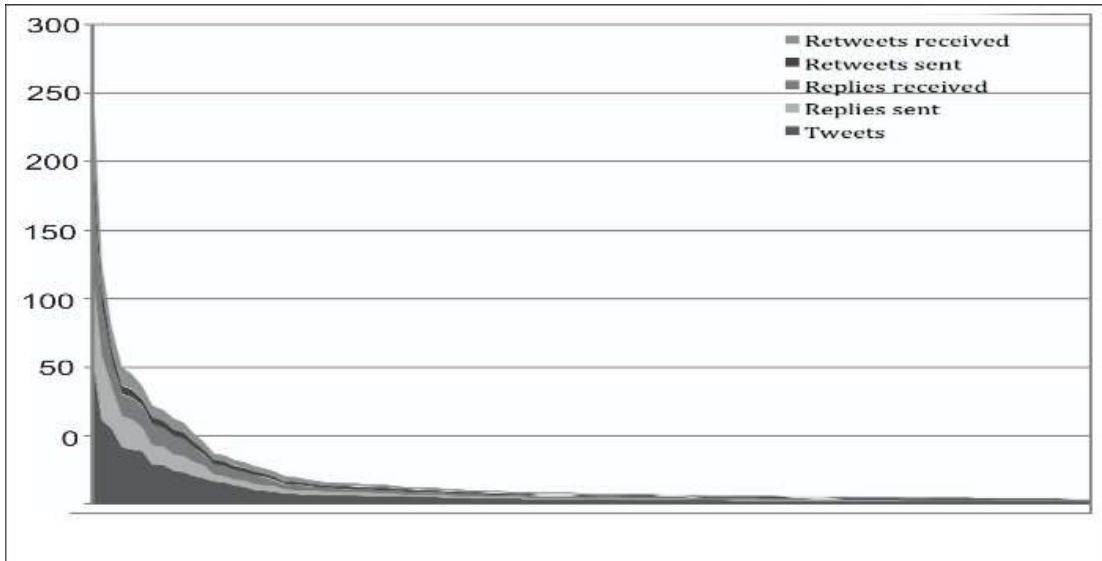
Only one respondent was aware of the initial actions that the Airline took when the incident occurred. The respondent, who happened to be a senior communications officer, indicated that the information had to go through the relevant procedures laid down by the company before being released. The respondents also indicated that passengers inquired about the incident for further clarification. As such, the incident attracted significant inquiries. All the respondents indicated that Twitter should be used by the airline during crisis situation to provide correct information about crisis.

4.2. Tweet Frequency Distribution

The initial step to evaluating Twitter's character as a platform for public debate on the crisis involving a human body dropping at Heathrow is to consider activity distribution among users. Even though the incident happened on 1 July 2019, the data pattern showed an abrupt rise in the number of tweets per day after two days of the incident. The volume of the tweet reached its climax on the third day, on 2019-07-03, at 213 tweets. Considering the volume of tweets on the incident when it occurred, the volume of data on the third day was three times as large as tweets recorded on the first two days. From the third day, the data shows a constant decrease in the volume of tweets per day.

There were 103 different users who published tweets from the 10 day period. This is a relatively high number of speakers. However, there was expression of diverse activity levels. The distribution of the various kinds of modes of communication among the top 30 users is shown in

Figure 4.1: Tweet distribution among top 30 users, July 1-July 10, key words “stowaway body fall”



The power law distribution determines how much an individual user tweets. The phrase refers to the observation that minute incidences are exceedingly common while large occurrences are exceedingly uncommon. The most active user published almost twice as many tweets compared to the second most active user. Only 8 users published more than 20 tweets and a mere 7.3 percent or 5 users published more than 5 tweets. The same pattern is followed by retweets. Out of the total 734 tweets, retweets comprised 232. When combined, 89 users retweeted even though only 12 users retweeted 5 times. As with the tweets, the most active retweeter disseminated more than double the retweets compared to the second person in the list.

An analysis of the top 5 users was conducted in the communication in order to comprehend the character of the most active users. The assessment of the users suggested that the number of tweets published within the first 3 days was 431 tweets ranging from 82 to 18 tweets per account.

The majority of users exclusively published original tweets and retweets with 94 percent of the tweets containing URLs. Averagely, the individual retweet count ranged from 0 to 13.79. The communication pattern after the first three days appeared similar. All users published only tweets or retweets. URL detection showed that 97 percent of the published tweets or retweets had links.

Most of the users potentially have a close relationship or possess similar admin given that they frequently retweeted one another and in most cases referred to the same account. An assessment of the account descriptions revealed that the top users were private individuals (e.g. Mark Philo) together with unverified and verified news accounts (e.g. ‘SkyNewsBreaking’, ‘NationBreakingNews’, ‘Time’, or ‘Airlive’). Noticeably, fewer tweets were published by the official media accounts such as “NationBreakingNews” compared to unverified top users. Moreover, the concerned airline was not part of the top users group given that it did not publish any tweet related to the Heathrow incident. Below are some of the tweets about the incident.



AIRLIVE @airlivenet · Jul 1

BREAKING A **body** fell from Kenya Airways flight #KQ100 on final approach to London **Heathrow**



BREAKING A body fell from Kenya Airways flight #KQ100 on final appro...
The man fell from a Kenya Airways plane at the end of a nine-hour flight #KQ100 from Nairobi. The gruesome discovery was made at a property ...
airlive.net

Figure 4.2: URL from original Tweet

The above tweet contains a URL from an original tweet. The tweet is from an unverified news channel. Other tweets are mainly retweets from news agencies.

To comprehend the kind of content that was widely shared in terms of retweets by other users, an analysis of the top 10 retweets in the communication were analysed. According to the assessment, the most popular tweet with regard to being retweeted was satirical comments associated with the victim. News entries were the most retweeted messages as shown in the below.

Figure 4.3: Tweets from news agencies on the incident



Noticeably, there was no hashtags in any of the retweets. Moreover, the follower counts of the publishers varied between 23 and 600,000. An evaluation of the description of the accounts showed that thirty three percent of the top retweets emanated from accounts that were neither associated with the airline that was involved in the crisis nor general news sharing. Instead, they were individual accounts. Two thirds of the tweets and retweets were published by national and international news or media accounts. The majority of tweets published by private persons included links to tweets first published by news agencies. They also contained multimedia or text contents which were mainly commentaries or personal opinions concerning the incident and in most cases were characterised by humor or satire despite the fact that the incident was tragic. Below is an extract of tweets and comments.

Figure 4.4: Tweet by a user on the incident

Nduta @ShazieKe

Body of A Male fall off a Kenya Airways Flight in Heathrow Airport, London Moments before landing.



9:07 PM - Jul 1, 2019 - Twitter for Android

15 Retweets 52 Likes

Mangala Kalioni @brngesu · Jul 1
Replying to @ShazieKe
How now? From landing gear pouch? Must hv froze to death (-52deg C up there at 35k ft). Question is how did he get in there?!

arthurkiarie @jay_karie · Jul 2
And lack of oxygen too.

Makhosonke Mkhali @MakhosonkeSA · Jul 1
Replying to @ShazieKe
lyooooo that's sad. Ugibele kanjani pho? (How did he climb there)?

Middle-Child @HunchoBoss5 · Jul 1
Replying to @ShazieKe
Wtf😞

Njoki @_Njokie · Jul 1
Replying to @ShazieKe
Tf!

Nduta @ShazieKe · Jul 1
Kenyans

Gad Otieno @GadOtieno · Jul 2
Replying to @ShazieKe
*fell

Figure 4.5.: Tweet by a user on the incident

Mark Philo @markphilo · Jul 2
Replying to @markphilo
This isn't the first incident in Heathrow airport. In 2015, British airways flight from Johannesburg, a stowaway fell on roof and died during final approach while another was found alive on undercarriage



Body of 'aeroplane stowaway' found in garden
The person is believed to have fallen from a Kenya Airways flight from Nairobi on Sunday afternoon.
bbc.co.uk

1 1 0 0

Vote Blue 2020 @whitney_cat · Jul 1
Replying to @markphilo
I think when they say body it means they didnt live

1 1 15 0

1 more reply

Aidan 🇺🇸 @Gaga_BoyBeliebs · Jul 1
Replying to @markphilo
Imagine coming home from work and finding a body in your back garden 🤢🤢

4 1 42 0

Mernski @Mernski14 · Jul 1
Imagine flying all the way from Nairobi and falling out the plane about 3 mins from landing

5 1 114 0

1 more reply

Dr Jinn @58R · Jul 2
Replying to @markphilo
Hypothermia plus hypoxia very illl chance of survival in an un pressurised undercarriage compartment and temps as low as -54 deg C ... sad :(

0 1 8 0

Barry Garner @Thebargar · Jul 2
Replying to @markphilo
I'm very sad for this man however in this day and age how did he manage to get on the plane. What would have happend if he had of been carrying a bomb ? He wasn't I know. Very sad for the person that witnessed this.

0 1 2 0

Kathleen Hicks @KathleenHicks · Jul 1
Replying to @markphilo

On the other hand, more than 70 percent of the retweets comprised of news headlines and associated links to the incident posted by official media accounts or third party news outlets.

Figure 4.6: Example of a retweet of an original tweet from a news agency



Once more, there were no tweets published by the concerned company that was involved in the incident. A detailed assessment of the news articles showed that less than 1 percent of the information derived from the company’s official press release. Instead, much of the information came from Heathrow Metropolitan Police. Additionally, it is important to point out that 14 of the top 50 retweets seen during the period are not associated with the incident and address other topics.

4.3 Analysis of Tweet Content

The researcher analysed tweets, retweets and @replies in order to gain more insight into the content including the majority of frequently used words in the tweets, retweets and @replies. The analysis showed that the company that was involved in the incident generated 3 original tweets. However, it did not retweet any content. By assessing the @replies, the researcher noticed that the company was mentioned more than 34 times even though it went on to respond to general service inquiries unrelated to the incident.

Figure 4.7: One of the Tweets mentioning the company involved.



There was no original tweet directly from the involved airline concerning the human body that dropped at Heathrow. However, there was one tweet from a user with an image of press release from the company (not a direct tweet). Upon deeper assessments, it was discovered that the tweet with the press release is associated with a journalist.

Figure 4.8: Image of press release by the company involved



Additionally, the researcher looked for the most active retweeters. In other words, the user whose messages were being forwarded most was analysed. A power law distribution pattern was revealed. The messages from the most retweeted user were picked and retweeted 72 times even though none of the users managed to retweet more than 5 times. As previously shown in Figure 1 the amount of replies retweeted and received per user showed similar distribution. These concentration measures in activity distribution are not surprising. They are similar to results from other research on online behaviour conducted by Hindman (2009) and Twitter's political communication (Larsson and Moe, 2011). Again, these results demonstrate the most positive expectations of the effects of mass participation on twitter. Further insights can be yielded by looking at the circulation of communication over time. The number of relevant tweets tagged with the hashtag #stowaway from the 10 day period came to about 3 tweets every hour.

However, there was uneven distribution of the tweets across the 10 day period. Again, there were more people tweeting during the day compared to during the night. There was a reduction in activity from the 3 day of the incident.

Considering the emotionality of the tweets, the researcher found that most of the tweets were neutral in that they were neither positive nor negative. Given that the incident involved loss of life, there were no positive tweets. A few users however were negative in their tones and this was mainly directed to the victim of the fall. Most of the tweets were satirical. The satire was mainly directed to the victim of the fall.

The volume of activity comprised the first observation. In comparison to other research, the #stowaway did not mean much given that the number of tweets every hour hardly reached 20. Again, the hashtag was not exclusively for the incident as there were other unrelated incidents and events with the hashtag. Suffice to say, this low activity level can be explained by the incident itself and the context. Studies on the use of Twitter during debate mainly focus on election campaigns (Bruns, 2010) or abrupt outbursts of public debate such as during political crises (i.e., Gaffney, 2010). The human body dropping at Heathrow is not associated with such events and hence it elicited a different kind of communication. The importance of the context is that there are much fewer users who would primarily discuss a human body dropping off a plane compared to, for example, a terrorist attack.

The peaks also comprise a second observation. A closer assessment of the content, senders and receivers of the tweets suggest different features for bursts of activities during the period under assessment. The most observable peak was on June 1st with almost 200 tweets. Noticeably, this was the day that the incident occurred. The growth in the number of tweets around 5 pm on June 1 reflected lively activity mainly comprising of replies between the core users. The same happened on 2nd July during morning hours as well as during the evening when there was some hours of activity in the form of replies. There were small peak results at other instances from a core user and this was mainly in the form of retweet which linked the event with coverage in the newspaper.

This activity level appears to be associated with several factors. The crisis was not just a trending issue that emerged quickly, only to be dropped by twitter users from the discussions. Instead, it seemed to be resilient also given that this was not the first time that a similar incident occurred at Heathrow. In fact, an unrestricted search on similar incidents suggest that there has been more than 10 incidents recorded of frozen human bodies dropping off planes minutes before landing at Heathrow. Variety of triggers can be associated with the height of activity when the crisis occurred. Among these are external triggers such as news reports and others are internal triggers such as the explosion in replies among the users. The fact that the incident stood out is signaled by internal triggers given that numerous studies have demonstrated that growth in Twitter activity relies on occurrences covered by or emanating from the mass media (Bruns, 2010). This association with mainstream media is interesting given that it signals to twitter being used in a way that transcends mere comments on events. In order to comprehend why the incident had these features, the researcher considered more closely the roles played by the various core users.

4.4 Core User Groups

The activities of the top 10 users is shown in figures 3-7 across the five measures which are the number of tweets, replies sent, replies received, sent retweets and received retweets. All these created a group of 20 main tweeters. Taken together with an evaluation of how the users represented themselves and their tweet content, the researcher categorised them into five major classes. These comprised of the following categories: activists, specialists, resources, debaters and followers.

4.4.1 Activists

The activists comprised the largest group among the major users. This can be accounted for by the fact that Twitter provides for steady communication which has introduced a new form of activism. According to Smith, activism is the process of exerting pressure by a group of people on institutions to change their practices, conditions or policies that are viewed as posing problems (Smith, 2005). An assessment of the tweet content of the activists expresses a need for action and deliberate push towards developing a support network and mass following. As argued by Heath and Palenchar (2009), the “internet and web capabilities have been a boon to activists as these individuals can join a movement and express support behind a computer screen or mobile device” (p. 181).

Beside the leading user ‘MarkPhilo’, the activist tag suits users such as ‘Nduta’, ‘Thumper’, ‘IkoteBrian’ and ‘JohnDeVries’ given that their activity on twitter showed some similarities as shown in Figure 3.

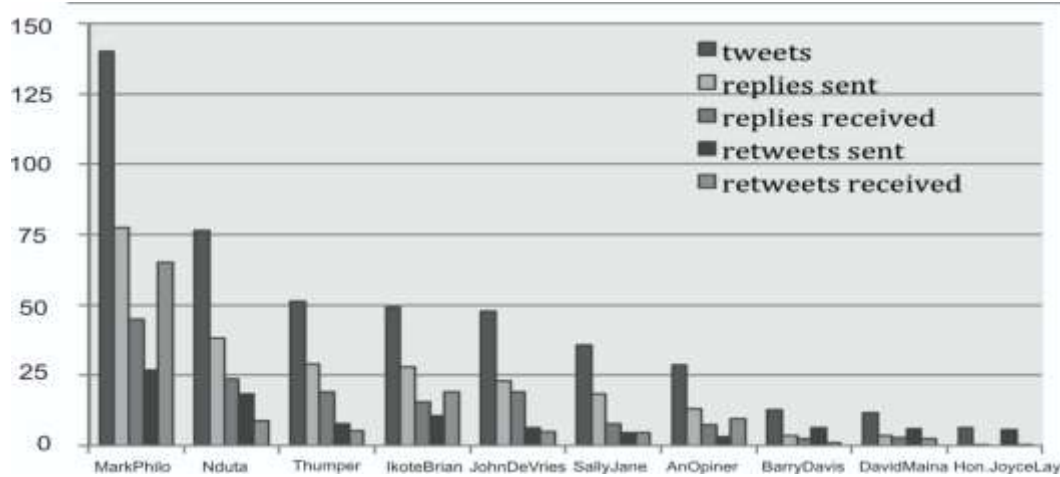


Figure 4.9: Twitter activity of 10 core users

These users were the most active considering the numbers of tweets they published with approximately half of the tweets being replies. A small percentage comprised of retweets while all of them got a smaller percentage of the retweets. All these activists were concerned about the safety issues in the airports and checking procedures before the planes took off. Twitter was used by this group to receive and spread the message about the incident and to debate its problematic dimensions. Even though many of the core users also were tweeting about other issues during the period of the study, the incident was crucial to their overall activity on Twitter.

Some of the core users demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the incident in their page as shown below.

Figure 4.10: A tweet by core user demonstrating dissatisfaction with the incident



The impact of these activists on Twitter followers was however not great, meaning that they were not necessarily leading the debates on the incident. None of them had more than 2,000 followers with few of them having less than 100 followers. Again, they comprised of first tier. The second tier in the group of major users comprised of BarryDavis and DavidMaina. They also expressed themselves as activists even though their activity on twitter suggest both lower tweet numbers and relatively higher numbers of retweets sent. In other words, they retweeted other people’s messages instead of being retweeted.

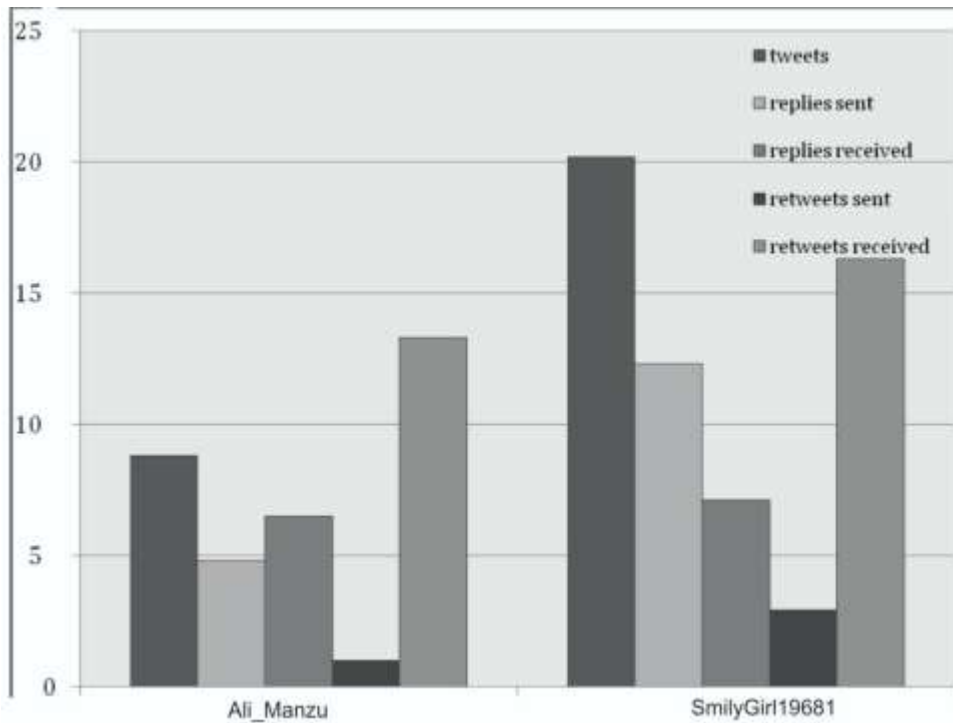
When the incident was first published online, the main cause of peak activity emanated from the activists. During the first hours of the incident, one of the activists tweeted 10 times. One of the activists expressed his disappointment with the incident, remarking: “So a plane landing at Heathrow lowers its landing gear and a dead body falls, time to review SAFETY POLICIES!”

This kind of tweet together with others was retweeted several times within two hours. This, however, does not imply that only the activists tweeted during the peak on 1st July. Within six hours from the initial tweet, a total of 72 users used the hashtag #stowaway which signaled how users deemed less active joined the debate.

4.4.2 Specialists

There is a second group of major users who can be described as specialists. This group is represented by Ali_Manzu and Smilygirl19681. These users demonstrated patterns which were the same as those showed by the activists even though they had a higher number of retweets received as shown in Figure 4. In other words, their tweets received more circulation.

Figure 4.11: Core user group specialist



An assessment of the user profiles of these specialists suggested that they were majorly journalists, writers or commentators. With their focus mainly on topical issues, this group published on a wider range of issues compared to the activists. They also demonstrated a more precise professional interest in their activity in the platform. In other words, it associated with their positions as journalists or consultants. When compared to the activists, the specialists had more followers even though this should not be construed as a measure of their impact (Romero et al., 2010). However, this can partly account for their success in receiving more retweets. Compared to the activists, the specialists seemed to utilize Twitter in drawing the public's attention to events or opinions occurring elsewhere online.

4.4.3 Resources

The third group comprises of users who can be termed as 'resources'. This group comprises of verified news outlets such as 'NationBreaking' and 'Airlive'. The number of retweets received by this group is higher compared to their publishing. The implication is that the small number of original tweets they published was highly re-circulated by other Twitter users. They also had many followers with NationBreaking having more than 680,000 followers, the highest number in the data set. Going by the number of followers and the retweets, this category of users were popular and acted as credible sources, at times setting the agenda. This mechanism can be seen in action on June 1 when 'NationBreaking' published a message altering its followers on the incident. A few hours later, the post which had a link to the main story was retweeted more than 30 times. Users were drawn to the post which comprised one of the peaks in the timeline. To some extent, it set the agenda for discussing the crisis on the platform. There was also other less successful resource with one of them, 'In_former' having one of its tweets linking to the human

body dropping incident being retweeted. All the three categories of users were disappointed by the incident. Taken together, they comprised the majority of the core users with their perspectives highlighting the general feeling about the incident on Twitter during the period.

4.4.4 Conversationists

The fourth group had very high rates of replies and was hence labeled ‘conversationists’ following Mo (2012) categorisation. This category had followers running into hundreds with all their posts about the incident being focused on other users. It is also within this category that the highest number of replies was recorded. The implication is that these users were not very much engaged in spreading the information about the incident but rather participated in the dialogue. This class of users appeared to problematise the arguments advanced by those engaged in the debate which in most cases led to very particular discussions, such as safety measures in airports or sensitisation of passengers on dangers of hiding in the undercarriage of planes. One characteristic of these users is that they appeared to be quite informed and enthusiastic of lively debates. For example, one of the active users within this category recommended to other users on who to follow by listing the major activists and specialists together with other fellow conversationists. Several acknowledgements were exchanged by the core users in the three groups during the period under study, in most cases with a lot of humor and sarcasm, expression appreciation for inspiring debate.

4.4.5 Followers

The fifth and final group can be labeled as 'followers' with their tweeting being characterised by the great number of replies they received. They actually received more replies than sending. The implication is that many users addressed the tweets about the incident to them. These followers were part of minority users in Twitter who seemed to exonerate those involved in the crisis. In fact, they seemed to be sympathetic to the victim of the fall and mainly held that even the concerned company was not to be blamed for the crisis. The number of replies that this group received can be accounted for through the antagonists who addressed these supporters with important issues.

The recognition of the five categories among the group of core tweeters about the crisis and their major features is indicative of the various functions that tweeting has for the participation of different users. However, the main issue which also concerns this study is what this classification of core users and their activities say concerning Twitter as an online platform for debates during crisis.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0. Overview

This section presents the summary, conclusion and recommendation of the study following the previous chapter. The results are summarised and conclusion drawn. Finally, the chapter ends with a statement of recommendation for further studies.

5.1. Summary

The infrastructure that makes up the public domain can be said to be communication technologies. To varying degree, they are meant to offer informational channels from one person to another apart from functioning as platforms for discussions for various citizen groupings, whether large or small and comprise the channel for communicating public opinion. This principle can be particularised and put into use in various ways. To discuss how Twitter performs as an online platform for debates during crisis, this study has focused on participation.

From the analysis, it appeared more likely that those users who sought information posted news. From the analysis of the results, it is apparent that those users who tweeted on the incident were generally information seekers. News stories are more likely to be posted by information seekers for the stories to be for them for retrieval in the future when the information will be required. Content sharing satisfies both individual needs as well as for those who are in the social network of the user. News stories are spread by socialisers in the expectation that it will result in possible social relationships. The motivation behind news story sharing is the anticipation by the user of

such relationships. Status seeking need also motivates users to share news stories on Twitter. The desire to be credible and confident drives individuals to improve their status. Through sharing news on Twitter, a user helps others to get hold of information that is relevant to them. By sharing relevant content, users aim to be recognised by their friends as opinion leaders.

Uses and gratification research view the audience as purposefully and consciously selecting messages to fulfill personal needs as opposed to passively receiving or responding to media (Meyrowitz, 2002). Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren (1985) posit that “the social psychological origins of needs, values, and beliefs,” combined with feedback from past experiences, influence motivations for media use and non-media use behaviours (p. 16). This theory was used to better comprehend the way in which users use Twitter and why.

5.2 Conclusion

This study has found that Twitter is an important platform for conducting debates during crisis. Apart from the tweet sentiments, much can be learned concerning how crisis is communicated through analysing who tweeted what content and to what degree. The researcher separated the tweets that had links (URL) as a predictor of ‘gate watching’ given that this practice is concerned with collaborating to identify and forward circumstantially relevant information. Attention was also paid to the disparities between the top users and the top tweets. An ongoing Twitter communication can be represented by top users, and this refers to the content which is being generated and published. Additionally, people’s needs and interests are reflected by top retweets given that the more likes and retweets are achieved by a tweet, the much broader it is shared and spread. This behaviour of sharing information implies that there is some particular information that is required and that people have a need for sharing this information.

It is important to state that a number of top ranking retweets did not have URLs but were instead individual, mostly satirical comments on the incident. This emanated from unverified accounts. Consequently, this can be categorised as audiencing given that Twitter functions as a backchannel. The implication is that Twitter is an unofficial and informational communication channel in which individuals' converse back at the events that are happening. URL sharing is not low compared to the mainstream media events even though it still suggests the presence of behaviour associated with news seeking and sharing and also point to the need for getting and sharing opinions.

5.3 Recommendations

My take is Twitter is a great tool for communication in handling crisis, constant Tweeting and updates as a whole goes a long way in clearing the air and reassuring the public. Since there are large numbers of people using Twitter, communication travels faster, realtime, to the intended audience. Though there is sometimes a huge percentage of negative comments most of the time one finds those who are ready to give genuine feedback without bias and also make suggestions, like in this study most comments were neutral.

- i. The recommendation is that Twitter as a new media platform be considered as a catalyst for debates on diverse matters including crisis. However, there is need to further conduct in-depth analysis of Twitter as an online platform for debates during crisis situation.
- ii. Companies should ensure that they are aware and in the know through issues that are debated online given that some issues might be directly affecting the needing their attention
- iii. online debates are very healthy for building of the nation in that they provide criticism that are sometimes able to bring changes for example in the case of the human body that dropped, in heathrow was security enhanced after the incident

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Please take a few minutes to answer the following interview questions. Your specific answers will be completely anonymous, but your views, in combination with those of others are extremely important. The information generated will be purely used for academic purposes in order to investigate how online debates are during crisis in Twitter with specific focus on the human body that dropped from a Kenya Airways flight in London, Heathrow.

Part A: Participants Information

1. Gender. Male female

2. Age range.
Below 20 years 21-35 years 36-45 years 45-60 years Above 60 years

3. How long have you worked for Kenya Airways?
Less than 2 years 2-5 years More than 5 years

4. What is your position
.....
.....

Part B: Interview Questions

5. Do you think twitter is an important communication platform for Kenya Airways?

6. How is the platform used in communicating crisis?

7. Are you aware of the crisis involving a body that fell off KQ Airline in Heathrow Airport? How did you get to know about the incident?

8. What were the initial steps and processes that the Airline took in order to communicate the incident?

9. Was there significance response from the public owing to the incident?

10. In your opinion, how do you think KQ should be using Twitter during crisis situation?

11. In your opinion, did Twitter play a major role in communicating the incident to its passengers and public at large?


APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE RESPONSE SHEET

	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
PART A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION					
1. Gender	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	FEMALE
2. Age	21-35	21-35	36-45	21-35	36-45
3. Duration worked	Less than 2 yrs	Between 2-5 years	More than 5 years	Between 2-5 years	Between 2-5 years
4. Position	Purser of KQ100	Head of IT	Head of marketing	Head of Communications	Head of social Media
PART B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS					
5. Do you think twitter is an important communication platform for Kenya Airways?	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
6. How is the platform used in communicating crisis?	Inform our clientele on an incident	Update stakeholders and customers on what is being done	By Tweeting updates	Relaying information	Information and updates
7. Are you aware of the crisis involving a body that fell off KQ Airline in Heathrow Airport? How did you get to know about the incident?	Yes. Through colleagues	Yes. Through Twitter	Yes. Through the local dailies	Yes. Media	Yes. Through the cabin crew on the flight on that day.
8. What were the	Inform	Wait for	Confirm	Verify the	Follow the

initial steps and processes that the Airline took in order to communicate the incident?	relevant department	official communication from the relevant department	reports.	reports and contact authorities in London.	stipulated communication guidelines
9. Was there significance response from the passengers owing to the incident?	Yes	Not aware	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. In your opinion, how do you think KQ should be using Twitter during crisis situation?	To provide information on the steps being taken.	Minimise panic.	Provide accurate information to avoid fake news.	Protect the image of the institution.	Offer information relevant to reducing rumors and incorrect information.
11. In your opinion, did Twitter play a major role in communicating the incident to its passengers and public at large?	No. It was not officially published.	No.	No.	No.	No.

APPENDIX III: CERTIFICATE OF FIELD WORK


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This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on 9/8/2019 in respect of M.A/PhD. Project/Thesis Proposal defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the project can be allowed to proceed for fieldwork.

Reg. No: K50/32824/2015
Name: JACKLINE A ONEDO

Title: ONLINE DEBATES DURING CRISIS: THE CASE OF TWITTER WE DURING THE 2019 HUMAN BODY DROPPING FROM AN AIRCRAFT AT HEATHROW AIRPORT.

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<u>Dr Samuel Sirigi</u> ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR	<u>[Signature]</u> SIGNATURE	<u>18/9/19</u> DATE
<u>Prof Ndeh Ndeh</u> DIRECTOR	<u>[Signature]</u> SIGNATURE/STAMP	<u>18.9.19</u> DATE



APPENDIX V: ORIGINALITY REPORT

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APPENDIX IV: CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTIONS


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This is to certify that all corrections proposed at the Board of Examiners meeting held on 04/11/2019 in respect of M.A/PhD: Project/Thesis defence have been effected to my/our satisfaction and the project/thesis can be allowed to proceed for binding

Reg. No: K50/82824/2015
Name: JACKLINE AKINJI OMEDO
Title: ONLINE DEBATES DURING CRISIS: THE CASE OF TWITTER USE DURING THE 2019 HUMAN BODY DROPPING FROM AIRCRAFT AT HEATHROW AIRPORT.

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