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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS
TOOL AT ETHIOPIAN ATHLETICS FEDERATION

MA THESIS

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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC
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FEDERATION

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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This is to certify that this thesis has been prepared by Hana Gebresilassie, entitled, “The use of social media as a public relations tool at Ethiopian athletics federation” and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communications complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**The use of social media as a public relations tool at Ethiopian Athletics Federation**” is my original work and has not been presented for any degree in this or any other university or colleges, as well as all sources of material, used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name

Signature

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Addis Ababa June, 2021

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Abstract

Communication and its practices are changing through time, and the radical technological advancements have revolutionized its environment, and force so many practitioners to go online than the formerly offline modes and communication via mainstream media.

Currently done research have indicated that social media practices in developed countries and organized structures completely differ from the developing countries like Ethiopia. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine current social media practice, understand the perceived utility of social media in achieving organizational goals and investigate the barriers faced by the Ethiopian Athletics Federation's PR and communications department in the use of social media.

In this paper qualitative form of data collection were employed with the use of interviews. The open-ended questions were asked to purposively selected participants like PR personnel that are working in the PR and communications department of EAF, and few stakeholders. In the data presentation and analysis thematic analysis was used since this type of analysis has the ability to analyze the qualitative data in a better way than other techniques. The main findings from this research have revealed that social media platforms are used; particularly Facebook is given a due attention in the federation.

Therefore, since the interaction has been more from the organization to its 'undefined' stakeholders, and with few responses from the public. The researcher recommended that there should have been a need for more two-way interaction between the organizations and their publics, and there needs to be a social media strategy or standard guideline to properly administer all the possible platforms and evaluate their effectiveness in facilitating the communication between the two parties.

Keywords: social media, PR, communication, athletics, media, sports PR.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--------------------------------|
| Col. | Colonel |
| EAF | Ethiopian Athletics Federation |
| FB | Facebook |
| GS | General Secretary |
| PR | Public Relations |
| SM | Social Media |

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Public relation (PR) as the name indicates, describes the process of building a relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. PR is an essential element of any organization, and it is the results of the public relations that establishes and maintains positive perception with multiple audiences such as the general public, government, sponsors, and the media. This being said, public relations create a two-way communication between an organization and its target audiences. This type of communication has undergone significant changes in the past decade as the internet and social media have developed and proliferated across societies.

The development of the Internet has now transformed the way communication is being conducted. Prior to the internet communication was a one-way mechanism where information was “pushed” to the user. However, with the growth of internet and more, the development of social media has completely changed the landscape transforming the “push” mechanism to a “pull” mechanism. This means audience are no longer passive users but rather active users. This shift is giving public relations practitioners a unique opportunity to collect information, monitor public opinion on issues, and engages in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues. (McAllister & Taylor, 2007)

Social media has had a profound effect on society and continues to be one of the most powerful tools. Social media is now the leading online competitive service, replacing former outlets, as the number one use of the internet and an emerging communication channel for many. According to Paul Gillin (2008), a senior fellow, Society for New

Communications Research, social media is giving rise to a new style of communication that is characterized by conversation and community.

Additionally, social media can be characterized by the following:

1. Collaboration – creates the space for collaboration with others with similar, like minds or with those that have interest in the topic by providing the space to ask and answer questions, discuss, and share experience. This fosters the development of relationships through the exchange of ideas for personal and professional development.
2. Conversation – social media enhances communication with a wider and broader audience, that is to say it enables conversations and is not limited by geographical space or time.
3. Community – through the collaboration and conversations communities are built. Thus, people can access others with similar and shared interests and engage in various dialogues and exchanges of ideas with minimal barriers.

Therefore, the use of social media platforms, a PR practitioner is now able to cut out the third party to deliver its messages and can directly be the source of news. This being said access to information, in a very fast, all-networked, and sometimes free, manner is revolutionising many aspects of public relations research and practices.

1.1.1. Ethiopian Athletics Federation

It was on 04 June, 1961 that the Ethiopian Athletics Federation (EAF) was shaped and soon become a member of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) [the then World Athletics]. (Sileshi B., 2019) Since its inception the Ethiopian Athletics Federation (EAF) is one of the biggest and active sports federations in the country, and the only Olympic medal provider for Ethiopia. It is established to lead the administrative

aspects of Ethiopian athletics and promote and organize competitions in order to enhance the competitiveness, and also facilitate relations with respective federations at a continental and global level.

The first executive committee was headed by Lt. Colonel Birhane Tefera, the man officially recognized as the first president of the EAF. This committee started a formalized program where athletes competed domestically and internationally. (Sileshi B., 2019)

Currently the structure of its management is divided in two levels: a political one and a technical one. On the level of the official posts, the key positions of president, vice-president, general secretary and treasurer, as well as the choice of the members of the committee depend highly on the political criterion. Competences in athletics or in sport management are not necessary. As the country is a federal multi-ethnic country since 1991, the distribution of these positions reflects the balance of the new ethnical regions of the country. (Wolde B., Gaudin B., 2007)

Now, the federation is led by the Olympic medalists & renowned athletes Col. Derartu Tulu as a president and Gezahegn Abera being a vice-president, along with other 9 executive committee members.

A full-time General Secretary takes care of the day-to-day activities of the federation which now includes four departments; i.e. technical, public relations, development activities, and administration & finance. (Sileshi B., 2019)

The EAF is mostly known for its better forms of running & called "Track Federation" as it is short of throwing and jumping. Even Running hurdles and steeplechase are hardly practiced [having a slight progress in the past 2 years]. Furthermore, within the track activities, the sprint races (from 100m to 800m) are not especially favored. On the other hand, the middle and long distance races are over-represented: from 1500m up to the

marathon, all the disciplines are intensively and massively practiced. (Wolde B., Gaudin B., 2007)

EAF led all of the club, regional, and individual competitions to be held at Ethiopian soil. Alongside the EAF and the other state-level sports institutions, there are regional athletics federations that operate the day-to-day activities of athletes and academies under the concerned region.

Furthermore, clubs take care of nearly all athletes for training and coaching. Currently most of the clubs are owned by regional governments (Amhara, Oromia, Debub, etc...) and the military (Defense, regional Police, etc...). But there are few clubs that are owned by corporate institutions (like Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, Sur Construction, Messebo Cement, etc...) and few universities (like Sodo University, Debre Birhan University).

1.2. Statement of the problem

The research problem to be addressed in this paper is the use of social media as a communications and public relations tool in general, and Ethiopian Athletics Federations communications activities, in particular.

Although corporate websites, chat-rooms, email customer response facilities and electronic news release distribution are now viewed as standard aspects of public relations practice (Galloway, 2005) many public relations practitioners are struggling with the impact of new media (internet), and especially the social media. Because social media is growing rapidly and getting a large number of customers every day, it is important to analyze the impact social media has on the overall public relations practices.

The federations' communication function has always been failing to make some unexpected changes, a natural fact of organizational life and adapt quickly to new markets, challenges and environments. EAF's public relation practitioners actively use Facebook

(where they have more than 46,000 followers), than any of the other social media platforms, like Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, etc... to address their audience (stakeholders).

The PR practitioners focus on updating posts in the social media, particularly Facebook. However, they are not fully embracing or utilizing the power of social media, also the federation's official web site lacks an update (up-to-date information).

As the implementation of social media grows in the public relations workforce at a global scale, it is important to determine whether the Ethiopian Athletics Federation is keeping pace with this ever-growing phenomenon and offering adequate information for its audience and stakeholders.

This study explores the social media phenomena and the change that it has brought on public relations practices of EAF.

1.3. Research questions

- How are EAF's PR professionals using social media to communicate and made an impact?
- What social media platforms are most currently utilized by EAF, and why?
- How do the EAF's PR personnel communicate internally and externally?
- How has the use of social media by EAF attracting its stakeholders (such as athletes and fan engagement)?
- Are there any challenges for EAF's PR professionals to cope up with the latest technologies and approaches to communicate on social media?

1.4. Objective of the study

The general objective of this master's thesis is to investigate the PR practices of the Ethiopian Athletics Federation, particularly on social media.

The specific objectives of the research are:-

1. To investigate how the public relations practitioners of the EAF are using the social media platforms
2. To assess the advantages and challenges of social media on PR and communication activities of the Ethiopian Athletics Federation
3. To review the extent to which social media is changing the practices, relationship, attitude, method, and knowledge of PR practitioners of the EAF

1.4.1 Scope of the study

The limitation of this paper begins with the difficulty to access all stakeholders of the EAF. Unwillingness to respond to some of the interview questions by the employees of the federation, regarding their own limitations in capacity as well as fear of implication. Additionally, it was difficult to convince the anonymity of respondents and the impact of their responses on the research findings. In addition to this some exemplary contents have been lost or edited on the federation's social media accounts. Last but not least, limitation in sample size has also take place.

1.4.2. Significance of the study

In the Ethiopian athletics federation, the use of internet communication especially social media is upstanding. The public relation department runs the Facebook page and it has more than 46,000 followers. The employees post current information, news and also upload

photos so that their followers get up-to-date data regarding the federation, and its stakeholders, who are mainly coaches, athletes, and fans.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to discover how public relations practitioners in EAF are using the newly emerging media; the implications social media have on the public relations profession; and how the public relations professionals value these new media as a means to communicate with their audience and the public.

This study will help the federation in developing a PR and communication, and digital media strategy regarding its social media activities.

The study will give an insight to EAF's stakeholders like athletes' management organizations, coaches and athletes, on importance of social media in sport, and helps them avoid similar mistakes and obstacles that EAF is having. The research will also be a reference to future studies.

Chapter Two – Review of related literatures

This literature review presents an overview and understanding on how social media has emerged, becomes popular and influenced the global communication aspects in general, and public relations and communications activities of professional sports organizations and teams in particular.

In addition, this literature explains and is intended to understand how social media has influenced the strategies and application of social media in Ethiopian Athletics Federation's public relations and communication activities. The national athletics federation has more than 46,000 Facebook fans and hundreds of Twitter followers. It also seeks to analyze how social media improves the experience of the media, athletes and fans.

2.1. Digital PR

Digital public relations involves issuing online news releases to inform stakeholders about an organization's services or updates to these services, leveraging the power of journalism networks and disseminating information through the internet (Janet, G., 2010).

Digital public relations built links and rankings in search engines. The online news release provided unique exposure in search engines. Google News picked up the press release, giving it ranking for highly competitive keywords. Additional marketing strategies of the e-book that coordinated well with the online news release included a Stumble upon campaign, posting on forums, and other online PR activities (Null, C., 2008, Pg 32).

Social media are starting to play a more significant role and could be a wild card in attracting more links to your site, especially if you can create a little buzz. For some websites, content provided by the public builds traffic to that site and, consequently, rankings from search engines.

Digital PR is capable of producing significant increases in visitors to the organization's website and to targeted social media platforms. Digital PR, however, goes beyond the traditional avenues of public relations by harnessing the power of the Internet to reach a much wider audience of potential sponsors, athletes, coaches, and fans.

2.2. Social media

Early internet communication was limited to passive viewing of content on static pages. Companies and organizations created web pages, but they were more like digital brochures. Marketers and advertisers wrote and designed corporate websites that they planned would remain the same for the next several years. Interactivity was limited to email on a contact page. However, a shift in capability happened in the first few years of the twenty-first century that changed everything. This shift was so dramatic it was called Web 2.0, a term popularized in 2004 by open-source software advocate Tim O'Reilly and implying a comprehensive new software release of the World Wide Web, taking it from version 1.0 to version 2.0. (Malerik, D., 2012)

Social media has changed the way individuals connect with each other, share information, express themselves, and socialize with others (Lin, Fan & Chau, 2014). Furthermore, it has changed the way businesses interact with current and potential customers.

Social media depends on web-based technologies and now mobile technology to create highly interactive platforms for co-creating, sharing, discussing, and modifying user-generated content. These universal changes have significantly affected the way individuals, communities, and organizations communicate. (Malerik, D., 2012)

Since its inception in 1996, social media has managed to infiltrate half of the 7.7 billion people in the world. Social network platforms almost tripled their total user base in the last

decade, from 970 million in 2010 to the number passing 3.81 billion users in 2020. (Brian D., 2021)

One illustration of the pace of growth is to compare how long different media took to reach 50 million users. For example, it took radio thirty-eight years to reach 50 million users. The pace quickened with television. After TV was introduced in the 1950s, it took thirteen years to reach 50 million users. Yet today the pace of adoption in social media is tremendous. After Facebook's introduction, it only took the social network three-and-a-half years for 50 million users to open accounts (Keith A. Quesenberry, 2016)

The current percentage of people using social media is 50.64%% of the world's total population. However, when we look into platform penetration rates from people in eligible audiences, 83.36% of 4.57 billion global internet users and 90.71% of 4.20 billion mobile internet users are on social media. (Brian D., 2021)

Social media also makes traditional marketing, advertising, and public relations efforts more effective. Integration is a key and running a marketing, advertising, or public relations plan with social media pays off in real business results. A study published in the Journal of Marketing Research found that electronic word-of-mouth by customers delivers nearly twice as much customer acquisition compared to traditional marketing. (Malerk, D., 2012)

2.2.1. Types of social media platforms

Social media tools are categorized based on their functionality, into various groups. These groups include blogs, message boards, podcasts, micro blogs, bookmarks, networks, communities, and wikis. Web 2.0 takes on many forms such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, forums, photo- and video-sharing sites, collaborative tagging, social bookmarking, ratings, and reviews. Today Web 2.0 has even grown to include live streaming video on channels like Periscope, Facebook, and Instagram plus augmented reality experiences with Pokémon GO and 3D lenses developed for Snapchat (Malerik D., 2012).

On the other hand, Gorbach (2016) came up with four categories such as social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+), Micro blogging (Twitter, Tumblr), photo sharing (Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest) and video sharing (YouTube, Facebook Live, Periscope, Vimeo) and place more than 60 social media sites that are now active into these four categories.

2.2.2. Social media and organizations

One of the available tools to build relationships with fans is social media, especially Facebook and Twitter. Social media can provide opportunities for organizations to interact directly with the public (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009, as cited by Yuan W., & Shuhua Z.)

Organizations can use social media to promote dialogues and two-way conversations with the public (Mersham, Theunissen, & Peart, 2009). Organizations can use social media to involve their stakeholders and build a community under their mission and values (Lo & Waters, 2012). Worldwide 40% of all internet users utilize social media for work purposes, for instance 65% of Indonesians actively use social media in their jobs. (Brian D., 2021)

Researchers have examined the social-media use of diverse organizations including community colleges (McAllister & Taylor, 2007), for-profit corporations (Park & Reber, 2008), and nonprofit organizations (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). The functions that social media served for nonprofits comprised three major types: information sources, community builders, and promoters and mobilizers (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) stated that organizations could use social media to create an online community via bonding messages with their followers. Organizations' literature could also provide insights into community establishment. Social media is becoming more and more a part of everyday business life and understanding the business functions that social media can provide to organizations is essential (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017). Firms can more efficiently talk, listen, energize, support, and embrace their audiences and their ideas by integrating social media into their existing business activities.

Sanderson (2011) stated that some sport organizations prevent employees from using social media within the workplace to eliminate any future problems social media could bring. Many organizations have adopted policies to monitor and control the use of social media within the workplace. (Sanderson, 2011 p. 43)

In the study titled, *'It's a whole new ballgame'* by Jimmy Sanderson, the author argued that there are often many challenges that arise due to social media, particularly managing the content information (Sanderson, 2011). "Social media increased the chances of confidential data to be revealed. Its messages can be transmitted from any location where a person has Internet access, extending the possibility for information breaches well beyond the physical confines of the workplace." (Sanderson, 2011. p. 42).

2.2.3. Social media and sports

As of 2021, the number of people using social media is over 3.96 billion worldwide, with the average user having 8.6 accounts on different networking sites. Popular platforms like

Facebook have over 66.09% of their monthly users logging in to use social media daily. (Brian D., 2021)

In recent years social media has become the main media outlet in reaching and communicating with large audiences. It is utilized by millions of people and businesses across the world. Social media have specifically influenced professional sports teams and sports fans, changing the way professional sports leagues communicate and stay connected with sports fans worldwide.

In Sports Fans 2.0, David Sutera stated that all sports organizations realize the importance of social media. Social media allow sports teams to attract large numbers of viewers that are hard to reach (Sutera, 2013, cited by Anthony D., 2015). In addition, social media allow for sports teams to track the online activity of sports fans. This benefits the sports teams because they are able to better understand their consumers (Sutera, 2013, cited by Anthony D., 2015). In addition, social media allow for athletes or fans to express displeasure with sports teams' decisions.

Social media have received increased attention in the sport industry (Pedersen, 2012). Sport organizations, teams, and athletes have used social-media platforms to establish relationships with their respective audiences (Blaszka et al., 2012). Sport entities are ideally positioned to use social media, given existing fan bases and the ability to facilitate consumer interactions with sport products/services and with team members (Pedersen, 2012).

With the emergence of social media, fans have now been given the chance to further immerse themselves in the sport industry. Unlike other previous outlets used before, social media builds upon key characteristics that prior outlets may not have had. Components of social media, including increased opportunities with interactivity and asynchronicity, allow fans to feel more connected with those in the sports. (Malerk, D., 2012)

Social media have changed the traditional way athletes interact with their fans and could help athlete users meet needs such as entertainment, diversion, and information gathering (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010).

One social-media platform that has redefined communication among sports constituents is Twitter. According to Clavio and Kian (2010), Twitter has become a permanent fixture in the sport communication landscape since its introduction in 2006. Some sports properties have actively engaged in partnerships with Twitter to create specific hashtag (#) pages (Lawler, 2012).

Sanderson and Kassing (2011) asserted that blogs and Twitter revolutionized sports media by engaging athletes and teams in producing content actively. Sports organizations and sporting-event organizers need to identify the needs and motivations of sports consumers, use this information to shape their marketing communication online (Filo & Funk, 2005), and develop relationships with supporters (Beech, Chadwick, & Tapp, 2000).

Because of social media's unique traits it gives sources like Twitter the ability to "become a crucial, up-to-the-second ancillary means of information delivery for hardcore fans" (Grossman, 2011, p. 1).

Williams and Chinn (2010) proposed a model for sports marketers that highlighted the importance of potential relationship marketing goals through social media. The impact of social media on branding and marketing has also been used by sports organizations (Coyle, 2010). Although sports organizations' use of social media has been widely acknowledged (Gibbs et al., 2014), examinations of the role of social media in relationship establishment are limited, especially in professional teams. Researchers have called for an investigation of the Twitter-based relationship between sports organizations and fans (Hambrick et al., 2010). It has been suggested that there was a need to understand how sports organizations used social media from the relationship perspective.

2.2.4. Importance of Fans

It is obvious that the athletes and coaches are important for the competitiveness and development of athletics as a competition. But, fans are also as important as the athletes and without their participation, the sports industry would not be nearly as successful as it currently is.

Understanding what influences consumers' attendance, sports consumption, and social media interaction will help sports organizations, particularly EAF, in their strategic planning. There are key aspects to take into consideration when analyzing athletics fans, such as location of events, economics, and knowledge of the competitions, interests to attend and watch competitions.

Social connectedness is among the most frequently cited reasons for following a favorite team (Wang, 2006). This allows fans to communicate with each other and join a community that aligns with their interest. Social media is aiming to create that bond virtually and potentially lead to in-person meetups at games.

When we talk about consumer interaction in the virtual world, it is as important as the consumer interaction in the real world (Pralhad, C, Ramaswamy, V., 2004). A lot of sports teams do share certain facts and figures about the brand, which requires interaction from the fans over social media and these are certain things which fans may or may not be able to know about the team in the real world.

Social media provides different organizations with opportunities to build relationships and engage with their customers on a daily basis and make it an important relationship marketing tool (Abeza, G., O'reilly, N., Reid, I., 2013). Organizations use social media in the same way to connect with the people at an individual level by giving out certain offerings and doing some activities and asking their consumers/fans about their opinion on the certain thing (Santos, T., Correira, A., Biscaia, R., Pegoraro, A., 2019).

Furthermore, when we talk about fan engagement, it is a specific form of getting the customers engaged through every means possible. As stated by Biscaia et al, an organization has to develop and maintain a group of fans who are passionate about the success and failure of the teams as they are called the “Typical Customers” (Biscaia, R. Hedlund, D., Dickson, G., Naylor M., 2018)

In the present context, fan engagement has been closely associated with online engagement through different social media channels which has affected the manner sports organization communicate to their fans. Further, an online presence is being maintained by most professional sports teams presently on various social networking sites and expanding to new ones rapidly. In point of fact, sports organizations have never had as many opportunities as today to engage with all their fans, ranging from attending to their diehard fanatics to attracting casual fans’ involvement.

In recent years, with the increase popularity of social media, the way supporters engage with their clubs and athletes has also change, they are more engaged than ever and for some, sports plays a vital role in their daily life and hence sports organizations have invested significantly on propelling online engagement through various resources that would help meet the present demands of their fans globally (Vale, L., Fernandes, T., 2017).

2.2.5. The Ethiopian social media landscape

Data on Ethiopia shows that annual growth for Internet users is at 37% and the number of active social media users is growing by 20%, and findings show that majority of Ethiopians access the Internet from a mobile device. (Staff, 2018)

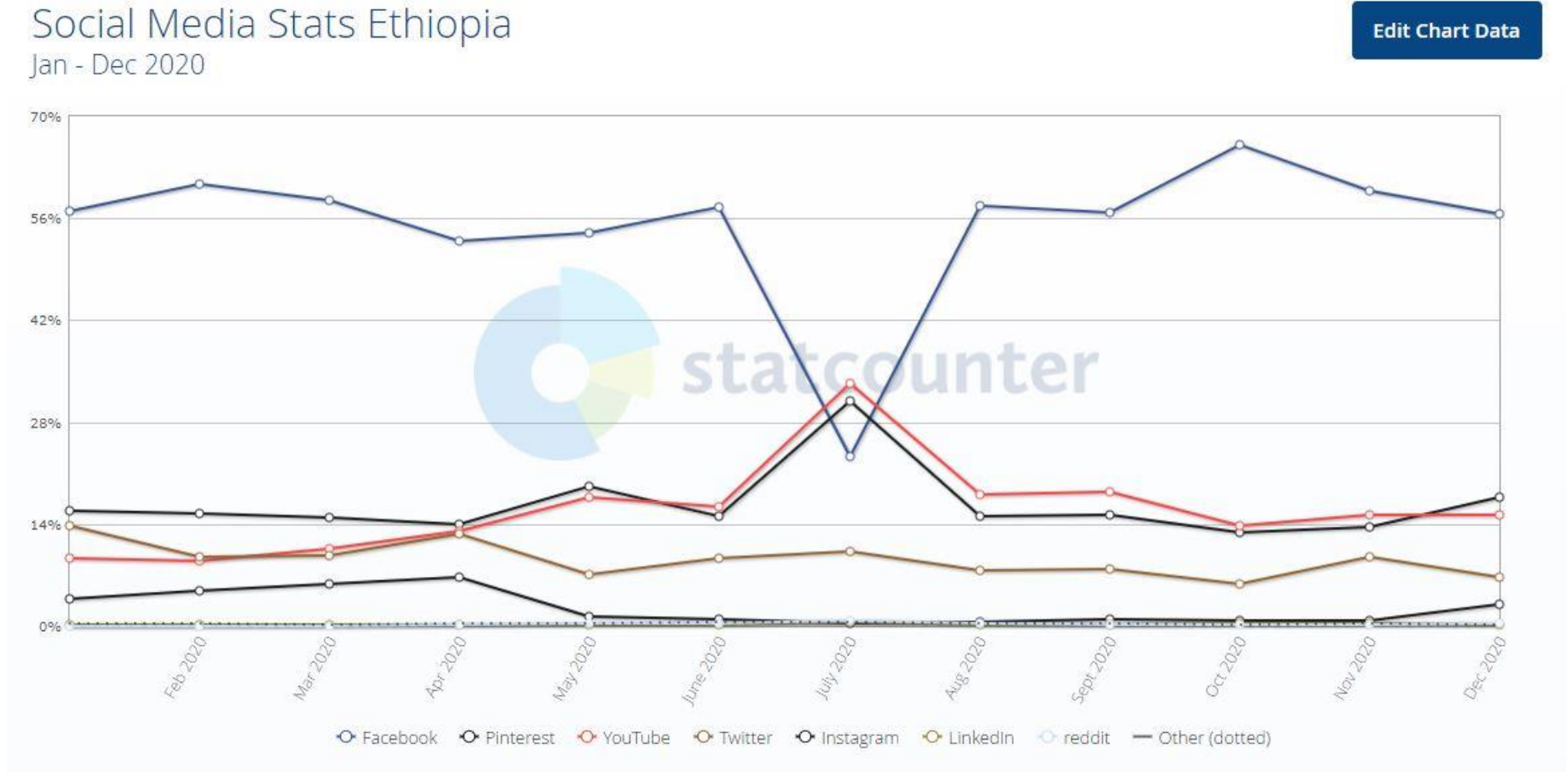
A report by FojoMedie Institute on July 20, 2019 explains that Ethiopia had the second-largest relative growth of social media in the world in 2018, which translates to the 16th largest absolute growth in the world and the third largest absolute growth in Africa (after Nigeria and South Africa). (Christer L. Pettersson&Nigussu Solomon, 2019)

More than twenty million Ethiopians use Facebook in Amharic, English, Oromiffa and other languages out of the total of hundred million people, and statistics (StatCounter, 2020/21) shows social media users, especially Facebook and YouTube users is increasing.

Figure 1: Ethiopia's social media stats (StatCounter, 2015)



Figure 2: Ethiopia's social media stats (StatCounter, 2020)



Social media in Ethiopia is essentially synonymous with Facebook, which commands 84% of social media users (as of February 2019). Other players are Google's YouTube, Facebook-owned Instagram, and messaging services Telegram and Facebook-owned WhatsApp. The principal online stakeholders in the social media market are essentially: the platform providers who are accumulating data for sale to advertisers and intelligence gatherers (or as an investment for future use); registered users/audiences who are willing to give away their data and are providing content; professional content providers such as news media and bloggers; advertisers who are diverting their funds from analogue platforms to reach ever-growing, captive audiences; and infrastructure suppliers and regulators. (Christer L. P., and Nigussu S., 2019)

The leading internet tech and social media companies, Facebook and Google, do not have any formal representation in Ethiopia. This applies for Facebook owned Instagram and WhatsApp as well as Google-owned YouTube. Unusually, the latest and most commonly used messaging app is Telegram.

Primarily, in Ethiopia, it seems that Telegram is used, in addition to its social use, for sales. Traders and entrepreneurs use Telegram to market and pay for their goods and services. Another incentive to use Telegram is that it allows for downloading software, videos and music illegally. Like Facebook's Messenger, Telegram also operates payment services in other markets. (Christer L. P., and Nigussu S., 2019)

State-owned EthioTelecom has the monopoly over telecommunication and broadband (where two international partners are announced as a winner of the auction to take a

strategic stake in EthioTelecom). With the expansion of telecom services and an increase in number of users' social media is expected to be the leading communicating platform.

2.3 Theoretical framework

In this section, concepts of information dissemination in social media networks will be discussed, and literatures will be reviewed accordingly. As EAF's PR & communication activities on the social media are merely focused in disseminating information to their targeted audience; like the media, athletes and fans, I would like to give emphasis on the dialogic and diffusion theories.

2.3.1 Dialogic Theory

Dialogic theory argues that organizations should be willing to interact with publics in honest and ethical ways in order to create effective organization-public communication channels (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five dialogic principles that could guide organizations to establish mediated, two-way, and dialogic relationships with publics. These principles involved (1) dialogic loops, (2) ease of interface, (3) conservation of visitors, (4) generation of return visits, and (5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics.

A handful of public relations studies have examined how various organizations build dialogic relationships with publics through weblogs and social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter. These studies often examine how organizations employ dialogic principles on their social media.

Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) studied how Fortune 500 companies used Twitter to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders and found that organizations with a dialogic

orientation to Twitter use were more likely to employ the dialogic principle of conservation of visitors than organizations with a non-dialogic orientation to Twitter.

2.3.2. Diffusion theory

Diffusion is the process by which information is spread from one place to another through interactions. It is a field that encompasses techniques from a plethora of sciences and techniques from different fields such as sociology, epidemiology, and ethnography. The diffusion process involves three main elements as follows:

1. **Sender.** A sender (or a group of senders) is responsible for initiating the diffusion process.
2. **Receiver.** A receiver (or a group of receivers) receives the diffusion information from the sender. Commonly, the number of receivers is higher than the number of senders.
3. **Medium.** This is the channel through which the diffusion information is sent from the sender to the receiver. This can be TV, newspaper, social media (e.g., a tweet on Twitter), social ties, air (in the case of a disease spreading process), etc. (Al-Taie M.Z., Kadry S., (2017))

The Diffusion Theory, also known as the Diffusion of Innovations, is used to explain how an idea or object is spread and adopted by a population of people. It evaluates basic characteristics of people in a population and places them in one of the five adopter categories to determine the most effective way to appeal to that specific audience. Each category explains how a group of people views a new idea, behavior or product and provides a five step process that each individual goes through when adopting something new: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. (Molly W., 2021)

The Diffusion of Innovations theory divides people into five separate categories that define the way people are persuaded and driven to adopt a new innovation. These five categories

are: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. While the majority of people fall in the middle of the bell curve, it's important to understand the variety of people that are in different audiences and groups of people. (Molly W., 2021)

When the social media is considered as an innovation, prior conditions like previous practices, individual needs, innovativeness and norms of the social system can also be associated with the social media usage. The huge expansion of new media and growing chance to experience these new and exciting platforms make people to wonder more about social media. As a result, individuals feel the need of using social media as a form of communication and start to get knowledge about these online platforms. (N. Gizem K., Seçil K., Evrim E., 2013)

Without understanding your target audience, one may design a campaign completely irrelevant to the way the population is influenced to try a product or adopt an idea. Understanding how consumers process information and make decisions leads to a successful campaign.

Social media which is one of the most striking innovations of today has extremely fast and efficient diffusion power with its various platforms and millions of users all around the world. According to diffusion of innovation approach, the factors as compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability and relative advantage have impacts on the decision and as a result the diffusion process of the innovation. In this sense, it is obvious that social media facilitates this diffusion with its dynamic, interactive, user-centered, user-friendly nature and with its opportunities that provides individuals more control over the contents and that enables users to become producers as well. (N. Gizem K., Seçil K., Evrim E., 2013).

Public relations professionals need to spend hours upon hours researching a particular population to understand how to most effectively communicate and share information. So, the diffusion theory presents an opportunity for PR professionals to learn about the way

that decisions are made, and provide a relevant and effective campaign. This is why it is important to understand the Diffusion of Innovations theory.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to collect data on current PR and communications practices related to social media usage by EAF, and analyze the use of social media in achieving its organizational goals. Moreover, it evaluates the perceived and actual hindrances faced by the PR personnel in EAF, mainly concerning the use of social media.

Even if it is still difficult to set any theoretical framework that could accommodate the latest innovations of social media, this study has also taken some basic principles of dialogic theory and diffusion innovation theory into consideration, of the PR personnel while selecting the target audience, designing & conveying a message and selecting a medium to communicate.

In this section of the research, the overall research methodology will be outlined and discussed with an intention to provide justification for the selected research approach and methods. Thus, the purpose of using much of a qualitative approach will be described and rationalised.

The document (content) collection, observation and interpretation process will also be explained.

3.2. Research design

This study examines current practices in relation to social media usage of EAF, and seeks to investigate recommended best practices to further enhance communication and promotional activities of the federation. Furthermore, it evaluates the perceived and actual

barriers faced by EAFs communication department, mainly concerning the use of social media.

In order to meet this target, the researcher will use an explanatory approach, which is mainly concerned with causes or “why” factor about some phenomenon. It does not involve comparison and factors of change. (McNabb David E., 2010, cited by Jamia Millia, I., 2016)

Therefore, the main participants (interviewees) of this study will be EAF’s PR & communications personnel, and management. But additional interviews with journalists, an athlete and a coach has also been made in order to find out how the federation’s PR is using its own social media pages to communicate.

3.3. Research approach

After assessing previously conducted researches in some other countries and organizations of similar behaviour, qualitative data gathering was selected as a dominant approach by the researcher, but also tried to analyse some elements in a quantitative approach. The researcher couldn’t find any previous studies focusing on similar topics in Ethiopia, and particularly about the EAF.

This leads the researcher to have one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and informants in order to gain an in-depth insight into the topic and the research study organization.

3.3.1. Data sources

For this study, the researcher used both primarily and secondary sources. As a primarily sources, in-depth interviews and the organization's social media pages' observation and analysis were used. As a secondary data sources, documents that were collected in relation with this study were also thoroughly reviewed and used in the analysis in line with data gathered through the primary sources.

3.3.2. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is mainly gathered from direct observations in contexts such as interviews. This study is more subjective in context and allows the researcher to become more active in the research while developing a conclusion from particular instances.

In order to obtain the necessary results to answer the research question of this study, most of the interviews (EAF officials and PR personnel) were face-to-face interviews and few of the interviews (an athlete, journalists and coach) were made by telephone and via email.

The researcher has made sure that all of the research questions, and some follow up questions for clarifications, were asked in each interview.

Therefore, the qualitative data collection and analysis methods is chosen based on which is most likely to offer an insight into the research questions.

3.3.3. Quantitative research

Quantitative research data is mainly gathered from the Ethiopian Athletics Federation's social media pages, particularly from EAF's Facebook page.

The study has conducted an observation of contents in a few samples from the social media (particularly EAF's Facebook posts). The selected samples are framed to a 28 days time (03 May, 2021 to 30 May, 2021), and contents are classified accordingly.

This secondary information will be used to gather additional information on how EAF's PR department is using the social media as a tool, and some more important information has also been collected from the website content and journals.

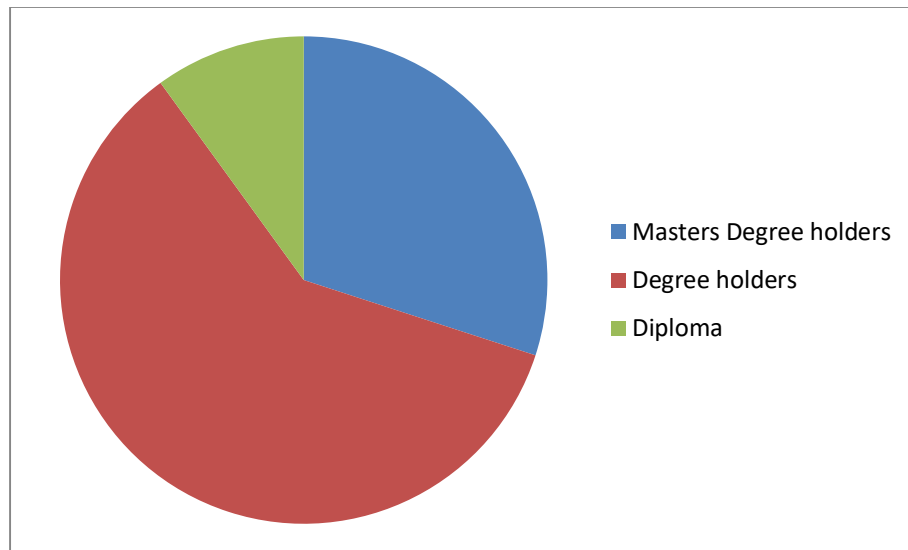
3.4. Research participants

All interviews were conducted with nine individuals. Five are EAF's personnel, four of them being a PR professionals and IT expert, and one from management. All have an average of 10 years and more of experience in their respective field.

Furthermore, two journalists that have specialized on athletics reporting, and one athlete and one coach, who follow social media pages of EAF have also taken part. They were all recruited by the researcher based on their knowledge, work experience, office role, exposure to the social media, and mandate to administer the federation's social media accounts.

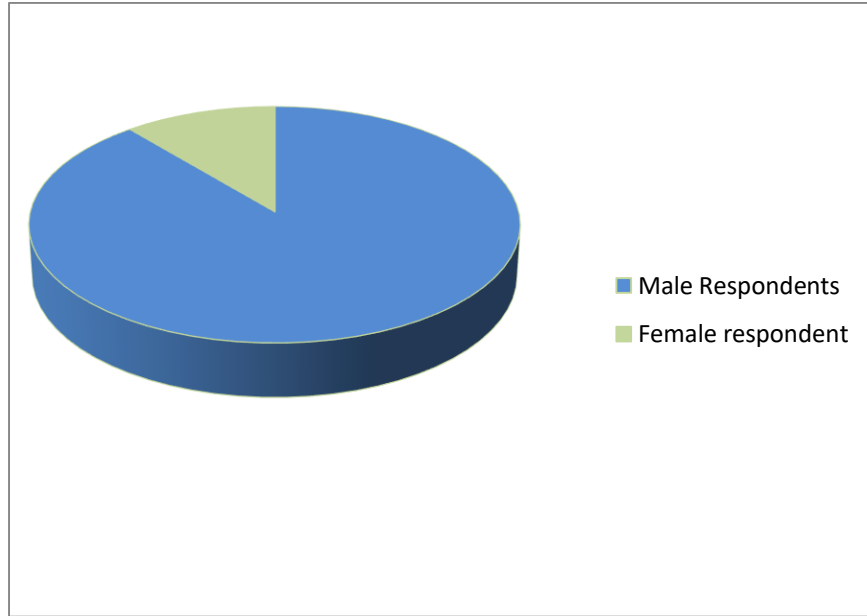
As indicated in Figure 3 below, most of the respondents were degree holders, and few more has masters' degree. One has a diploma, and none of the interviewees were found under the category of certificates or less.

Figure 3: Academic background of interview participants



Across sex, only one of the interview respondents was female, and respondents were dominantly male. Though the number of female participant was insignificant, it was included in the study.

Figure 4: Interview participants based on gender



Regarding their role, five out of nine interviewees are employees of EAF, two on a managerial role and three as officers. Two other participants are sport journalists each having more than 10 years of work experience. The remaining two are a professional athlete and a national team coach who are active on social media.

The one-on-one interviews (five out of nine) and a phone interview were conducted in Amharic, and the remaining three interviews were made in English, as the participants could communicate well in English. The researcher makes sure that the purpose of the research was clearly understood and all participants were briefed on their role and rights in terms of confidentiality and the format of the interview.

The reason for only having limited participants for the given study was, to ensure that information is collected from the main stakeholders, and make sure an adequate time was allocated to each of the participants. In addition, it also enables the researcher to analyze all their responses.

3.5. Data analysis method

As it is mentioned in the research design, explanatory approach will be applied in analyzing the collected information and data, where the researcher will have in-depth-interviews with those experienced personnel to take advantage of the information they are going to provide.

All answers for face-to-face interviews have been recorded; each interview was then listened to and transcribed. One phone interview was also recorded onto note sheets during the time of conversation. Three of the interviews were made via email, and all questions were sent and responded accordingly.

In addition to interviews some selected social media contents (posts) were viewed, collected, and analyzed.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles including anonymity, confidentiality and participants consent have been considered before starting the research. All selected participants for the interviews have been assured that their confidentiality has to be given top priority.

They were all informed that their confidentiality could be maintained by keeping their names and quotes anonymous and storing all data they provided in a secure and confidential environment during the study and destroyed later.

Chapter Four – Findings

4.1. Introduction

As it has been indicated in the previous sections, the primary objective of this study is to explore the use of social media at the Ethiopian Athletics Federation, as its public relations and communications tool, and identify the basic problems in due process.

In order to meet the purpose of the study and to find answers to the research questions, qualitative method of data gathering was used, and this chapter sets out the findings.

Data collection methods consisted of face to face interviews, researcher's observation of the federation's social media pages, and small size of social media-related report provided by interviewees. Research participants are composed of a secretary general of the federation, and all PR personnel of the communications department (four in numbers), two journalists, an athlete and a coach.

Thus, this chapter sets out the findings of the research as it pertains to the set objectives of the study and lays out the key outcomes of all the research.

The cumulative time of data recorded from one-on-one interviews (5 interviews) was around 137 minutes, from phone interviews (2 interviews) was around 17min, with each interview recording averaging around 22 minutes, and took around 80 minutes to transcribe the recorded data into text.

Although, much of the sample size was limited to the PR and communications department personnel, and few numbers of EAF's stakeholders (media, athlete and coach); and can be said relatively small, towards the end of the data collection process, the researcher realized data saturation was achieved when no new information was being presented by the participants.

4.2. Key Findings from interviews

4.2.1. EAF's PR personnel internal and external communication

All the personnel that the researcher has interviewed were asked how they perceive communications and how are they communicating with their own colleagues (internally) and with other stakeholders (externally).

The interviewees provided a response that they as an individual and EAF as an organization believes in the importance of communication in all aspects. Even if they all consider it as a key part of the federation, almost all of them agree on their limitations in communicating.

Interviewee 2 said that “even if the communication department is part of the main administrative structure, it is considered as a support system of the secretary general”. Interviewee 3 also affirms the statement by saying “almost all of the communication activities require the approval of the federation’s secretary general and it’s always through the GS that the department communicate with the executive committee”.

According to Interviewee 5, “there are few issues that the federation is obligated to use hard copies of documents to communicate; other than that all the staff uses internal file share system and telegram to chat”. He further added that “the federation still communicate manually, and things aren’t yet automated. Even if the federation has its own website that contains all the necessary information, it only has few visitors ranging from the least 100 to the maximum of 20,000”

Because athletics is one of the most popular sports in Ethiopia, and the globe there are key institutions that the federation considers as main stakeholders. The newly re-structured commission of youth and sport, which is under the ministry of culture and tourism being on top; the Ethiopian Olympics Committee, regional athletics federations, sport academies,

individual athletes, coaches, media, athletics fans, etc... are considered to be stakeholders of the federation.

Thus the respondents explained that depending on the message they are to relay they communicate with each stakeholder in a different way. However, when considering mass messaging they usually send bulk emails or making telephone calls. Additionally, the Federation still uses old communication methods such as sending out messages via Fax in order to communicate with its various stakeholders.

The federation does publish its own event magazines, fliers, pamphlets, etc... by in-house staff or by outsourcing projects to other service providers. In addition, “most of EAF’s communication works are delivered via the media; be it a press conference, a press release, or one-on-one interviews” said Interviewee 1.

Interviewee 2 mentioned that there are around 20-25 local media agencies and around 10 bloggers, that have an established relationship with the federation, and also from the international broadcasters like BBC, AP, Reuters, etc... they have an excellent working relationship.

The researcher also asks if they have documented all the communication materials for further references, and according to Interviewee 2 and 3 such documents, except phone conversations, are available.

4.2.2. Social media platforms most currently utilized by EAF

The social media pages of EAF are created at different times; the Facebook page according to Int. 2 “is created in 2015, during the World Athletics Championships in Beijing”, and Twitter (@eaf_ethio) & Instagram accounts are activated in May & June, 2017 respectively.

The five personnel of EAF were asked which social media platform they use for personally and almost all of them call for Facebook at first place, followed by Twitter, Instagram and Telegram. But they all believe that Facebook is more popular among Ethiopians and is more comfortable to use as a communication tool, than any other social media platforms.

Figure 5: EAF Social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, & Telegram respectively)



This personal assumption is also reflected on their usage of social media in the EAF's communication methods. Interviewee 1 believes that "EAF uses Facebook more because most of the 'targeted audiences' of the federation uses Facebook than the other platforms, and it's easy to address them". Similarly, Interviewee 3 thinks that "the social media is very helpful, particularly in sport, and Facebook is an easy way to reach out to a large athletics audience". Also Interviewee 4 agrees that "Social Media platforms are effective tools when used in a right way, to share and receive news and events, disseminate information, share videos and photos, and also interact with others".

Interviewee 2 says "we believe that our targeted groups such as athletes, coaches and media personalities use Facebook and we decided to post our stories on Facebook, and did no further assessment". According to Interviewee 4 "the Facebook page comes ahead of the other social media pages, I guess, for the majority of athletes, Facebook is easier than the other platforms to access information and we do kept that in mind". Likewise, Interviewee 5 is happy that "almost all of the local media follows EAF's Facebook page, and uses published contents as a source".

However, the PR and communications department has given no concrete reason for being active on Facebook and neglect the other platforms that are already created, and don't have an up-to-date information to their followers. "we need to have a strategic plan on this matter, there has been some groups and channels created for a particular event and disappear, this has to change", said Interview 1.

After a six years presence on Facebook, EAF's page has now more than forty six thousand followers. But no professional works has been done to increase the number of their followers, and yet none of the social media accounts are verified.

4.2.3. EAF's PR professionals use of social media to communicate and made an impact

Under this theme, the researcher asked different questions to all interviewees regarding the roles of social media in facilitating EAF's communication with all its stakeholders and made an impact. It's known that social media is building up a good PR for different organization, and similar federations to that of EAF. The increasing number of social media platforms along with the users has contributed to the creation of trust, better relationships, transparent system and consumer based medium.

Interviewee 2 considers athletes and coaches as the main target audiences of EAF's social media communication, and the main purpose of the platform is to let the public know what they are doing. Whereas Interviewee 1 said "the federation wants everyone to be their audience, but primary targets are athletes, coaches, referees, government officials, athletics fans and media". Other interviewees from EAF also agree on the above mentioned target audiences.

According to the researcher's observation on the stories posted on EAF's Facebook page, most of the contents are an announcement / invitation or results of Ethiopian athletes from a local or international tournament. Interviewee 4 also agrees on this observation and affirms it categorizing it into two "the first category can be news, and the other is advertisement & announcements". Additionally, Interviewee 4 mentioned "creation of events on Facebook, and some information to create awareness among athletes" as some of the important contents made.

The researcher has asked some stakeholders (three journalists, one athlete, and one coach) who already follow EAF's Facebook page, to find out why they follow and how often they check for updates.

Interviewee 6 follows and visits the Facebook page at least twice a week and said "that is the only active social media outlet where EAF release news, information and announcements, and that is the only trusted platform to check relevant updates from the federation". Similarly, Interviewee 5, 7, 8 and 9 follows EAF's Facebook and Twitter accounts, and all visits very often, "to get up-to-date information about Ethiopian Athletics". Furthermore, Interviewee 7 sees the page as "a tool for institutional or administrative communication than a way to promote a brand like what world athletics and other sport governing bodies do". In addition to this, Interviewee 8 explained, "with the presence of social media, it has become easier for me to get some detailed statement or information given at a press conferences and press releases".

The researcher has also observed that the contents posted mainly on Facebook and few of the other platforms are linguistically limited to Amharic, which is an official language of Ethiopia, but there are a number of journalists from all over the world, and athletics fans who follow African, particularly Ethiopian athletes and athletics, that desperately need to read stories in any other international languages like English, French or Arabic.

The interview participants also noted that the limitations in language have contributed to the inadequacy of their number of followers. "With the presence of the world's greatest long distance runners, EAF's Facebook and other social media pages could have been primary sources for the international media and athletics fans. But all their stories are linguistically limited and targeted only the local community" says Interviewee 8.

Interviewee 2 added "using two or more languages hasn't been a trend in the social media and EAF's team hasn't even thought about it before", whereas Interviewee 1 said "there were few posts with both Amharic and English, but failed at a proper editing and misleads the audience. But we can at least consider some other local languages that have been suggested by the government; like Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Somali, etc... to be more inclusive,

but to be honest we have never taught about that as we are limited with professionals and also equipment".

Despite the language being solely in Amharic, there are still engagements with the main stakeholders, particularly on Facebook. Interviewee 8 claims that "EAF's Facebook page is more a way to communicate with (address) the different stakeholders than to promote a brand and create a forum for the sport personalities to discuss at". Interviewee 3 remembers that "there were some humorous videos posted by the PR department and get their audience engaged with, but failed to meet the goals"

On the contrary, Interviewee 4 believes that "even if Ethiopia is successful at the Olympics games, the people love (focus more) on football than athletics. Unless there are grand tournaments or controversial subjects' overall engagements are very few in numbers". Referring to the monthly Facebook reports of the page; Interviewee 5 says "a single post has reached to a maximum number of one hundred twenty thousand (120,000) visitors, and the least number of viewers is recorded to be around one thousand (1,000)". He further added "people may not react (like, share or comment) on posts we made, unless it's they relate to the story or it is triggering".

Thus, "comparing it to any other sport institutions or personalities pages EAF's page has least number of followers, and contents need to be improved, and the page should get an official badge from Facebook itself" suggests Interviewee 1.

4.2.4. EAF stakeholders use of social media platforms to interact and give feedbacks to the federation

Different scholars agreed that social media has changed the concept and practices of PR in many ways, and the most significant change is the shift from one-way to two-way and multi-way communication. As it has been mentioned above, the Facebook page is

relatively the most active social media platform of EAF's PR and Communication department. However, it still is said to be back-warded and has limitations in addressing two-way symmetrically communication with its stakeholders. "Followers of the page like, share and give comments on the contents and not only the PR personnel but also myself check on the feedbacks; I sometimes try to clarify things when I find some misleading posts and people who misunderstand posts give a comment" said Interviewee 1.

Interviewee 6 believes that EAF's Facebook page is both worth visiting and disappointing at the same time. Explaining this argument, "I get almost all of the results of the federation races and some information about the athletes' national team selection. But, the national federation being the governing body of all the athletics activities in the country, the information it provides on social media and on the website is not as good as expected. In particular, the federation with an organized communication department is not using social media as expected to promote athletics and competitors as well as the sport itself in Ethiopia and worldwide"

Moreover Interviewee 7 added "the information via social media is still a one-way communication which fails to entertain further enquiries from the media. While I still value their communication team's effort to be active on Facebook, I insist that it should not be used as an excuse to limit/block further query from the media".

On the contrary, Interviewee 9 says it is one of his favorite pages to visit and get information from, "formerly I was suppose to go to their office or call some staffs to get all the necessary information about athletes and coaches selection, but now it is easier for me to access it from the Facebook page". Despite all its limitations, Interviewee 6 appreciate the current means of communication via Facebook remembering "as a sport journalist who particularly experienced challenging times to get even results for a race report, I can say the current situation is smooth and better".

According to Interviewee 2 "Facebook has eased the way the PR team received feedbacks, but at the same time when there are controversial subjects there will come some negative comments not only on the subject but also at particular individuals and administrators". Interviewee 3 added "we do usually get constructive criticisms and sometimes abusive comments on Facebook. Therefore, we don't react to all the comments but for some only".

"Our followers usually give us positive comments, suggesting better photographs to use, correcting mistakes on data (statistics), and in some cases they ask for some explanation on posts, and we will respond to such comments but not for others" said Interviewee 4.

Interviewee 7 also endorses their approach "the social media team in the department should start engaging with the page followers by responding to some of the comments considering their relevance".

However, in some instances, the unethical or inappropriate practice of adopting social media sites have resulted to negative consequences that affected the public's image as well as the organization's reputations. Therefore, primary role of social media should be creating and facilitating a smooth conversation between the federation and its stakeholders.

4.2.5. Technological challenges and coping mechanisms of EAF's PR professionals in social media use

Researchers suggest that PR or communications practitioners should be in charge of the social media sites. Public relations practitioners possess "know-how" in handling and employing social media tools for a two-way symmetrical model of public relations practice.

The lack of organizational capacity, resource, expertise, bias towards social media, have been barriers to social media usage, and an increase in number of followers in all possible platforms.

"Our stories aren't that impressive (interesting) to read, photographs use to be blurred or of less quality, because we don't have a professional graphics designer, we are still forced to outsource most of our publishing materials, and we don't do the same for the social media contents, rather we prefer to train the PR personnel" admitted Interviewee 1.

Whereas, Interviewee 3 disagrees on the argument that there is a limitation in the capacity of the employees, rather in numbers and the bureaucracy "those of us who are actively managing the social media accounts aren't more than three, and we always work to give our best, but the management always interferes and want to have a say on every single post we made. This totally hinders our creativity and motivation".

Interviewee 2 also gives an emphasis on management's negligence to social media "even if we keep on proposing, no budget has been allocated for social media management, promotion, or online payments".

Interviewee 7 believes that "they are doing well comparing to most of the other institutions, the information lacks depth and it ignores the timely details the public/media houses need. The quality of pictures attached with the stories lack natural connection with the content. And sometimes the timing of posts of announcements fails to serve the purpose".

It is of utmost importance that those who are involved with an organization's communication and or marketing processes should have as a minimum knowledge and understanding of social media functions. There seems to be general confusion within the sports industry about the best to use social media to add value and contribute to the organization; this is particularly true among not for profit sports (Thompson et al., 2014).

For Interviewee 4 "the communication department will be one of the leading PR teams with a huge social media presence if the management is willing to invest some money for online advertisements, all the staff work to upgrade him/her self, and reduce some of the tasks that are unnecessary allocated to the PR & communications department".

According to the researcher's observation there are also no human interest pieces that would be engaging to their audience. It is therefore possible that this would have an impact on how the social media presence of EAF is lagging behind, however it is an area of research that could be examined in future studies.

But the overwhelming consensus of those EAF personnel who took part in the qualitative interview is that all PR & communications department members are all qualified for the position and have no technical difficulties in doing so.

He further added that "there needs to be a capacity development program for the employees, fulfilment of professional equipment (like camera, server, etc...). Also the federation is about to implement a new reform that could uplift the communications department and its employees upon their level of competence".

4.4. Findings from document review

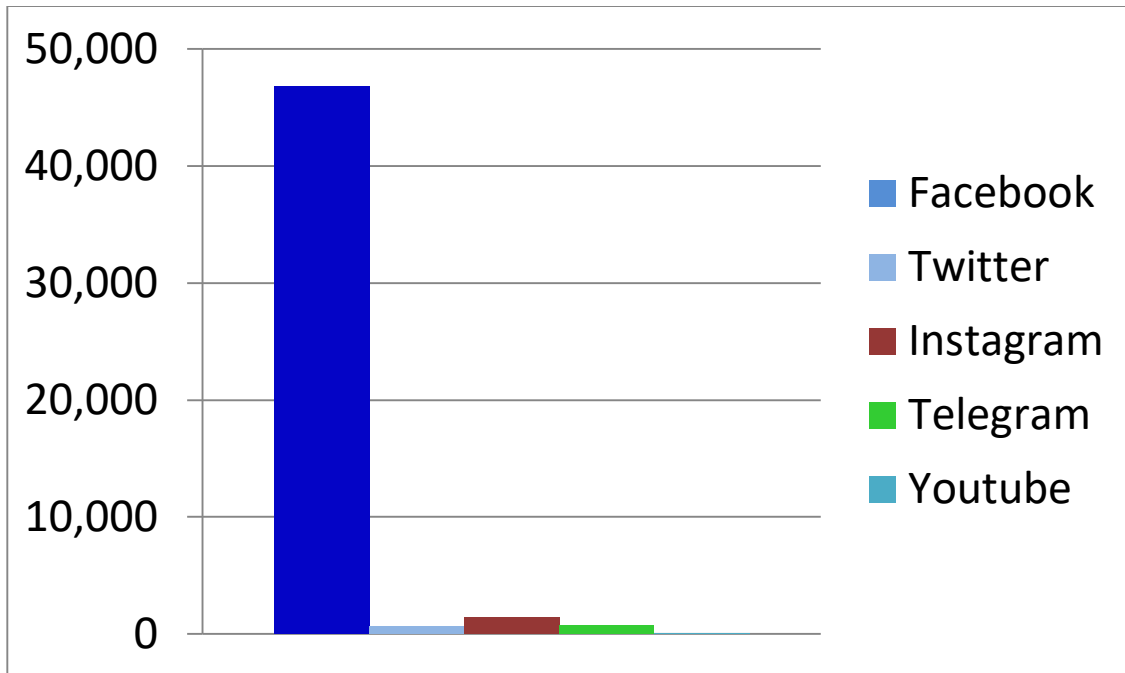
The researcher has reviewed the latest website of Ethiopian Athletics Federation, and its content. As it's mentioned in the response to the second research question it is much informative but not filled with latest information, and have no interactive segment in it.

In order to observe the social media presence of the federation, the researcher has made its own observation and analyze a Facebook monthly report spreadsheet report provided by one of the interviewees.

Table 1: EAF's Social media presence

| Name of platform | Account created (Year) | Number of Followers (Subscribers) | Verification |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Facebook | 2015 | 46,755 | None |
| Instagram | June 2017 | 1,424 | None |
| Twitter | May 2017 | 650 | None |
| Telegram | Jan 2019 | 748 | None |
| YouTube | June 2015 | 31 | None |


























Figure 6: EAF's social media engagement



The above table and figure shows that Facebook is dominantly used for EAF's communications activities. Thus the researcher reviewed contents (posts) of 28days (03 May until 30 May 2021) on the given Facebook page, and identified the contents in accordance with its messages, numbers of reactions, engagements, etc

Figure 7: EAF’s Facebook page insight on its engagement

■ Reach: Organic / Paid
 ■ Post Clicks
 ■ Reactions, Comments & Shares

| Published | Post | Type | Targeting | Reach | Engagement | Promote |
|------------------------|--|---|---|--|---|----------------------------|
| 05/28/2021 11:45 PM |  ትላንት በደሀ፣ ኪታር በተደረገ የዳይመንድ ሊግ ውድድር በ3000 ሜትር መሠናክል |  |  | 5K  | 108 109  | Boost Post |
| 05/23/2021 5:33 AM |  በስጦን፣ አጅራ ትናንት ምሽት በተካሄደ የአለም አትሌቲክስ የህስ አህጉራዊ ሚዲያ |  |  | 12.1K  | 483 260  | Boost Post |
| 05/21/2021 6:30 AM |  የክፍት ስራ መደብ ማስታወሻ |  |  | 3.4K  | 50 35  | Boost Post |
| 05/20/2021 12:09 AM |  ትላንት ግንቦት 11/2013 ዓ.ም. አመሻሽ ላይ በኾክ ሪፐብሊክ አስትራፖ ከተማ |  |  | 12.1K  | 503 255  | Boost Post |
| 05/18/2021 6:18 AM |  ለቶኪዮ 2020 ለሊምፒክ ሃራችን ከ800 ሜትር ለስከ 10000 ሜትር እንዲሁም |  |  | 20K  | 1.9K 376  | Boost Post |

An administrative body of the most popular and successful sport, athletics, in Ethiopia, which has a presence on Instagram, Twitter and Telegram is presented as inactive account. This is observed and explained by the last stories it has published. Whereas, the Facebook account of the federation is said to be the most active but yet not interactive because it doesn’t encourage athletes, coaches, and fans to participate in a two-way communication.

Most of the leading social media platforms; including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube offer inbuilt tools to calculate their users reaches. Therefore, the researcher uses the Facebook monthly insight data, to calculate the organic and average reach of the posts.

Thus, the total number of page viewers, the number of new followers and an overall engagement on EAF's Facebook page has involved more than sixteen thousand people,

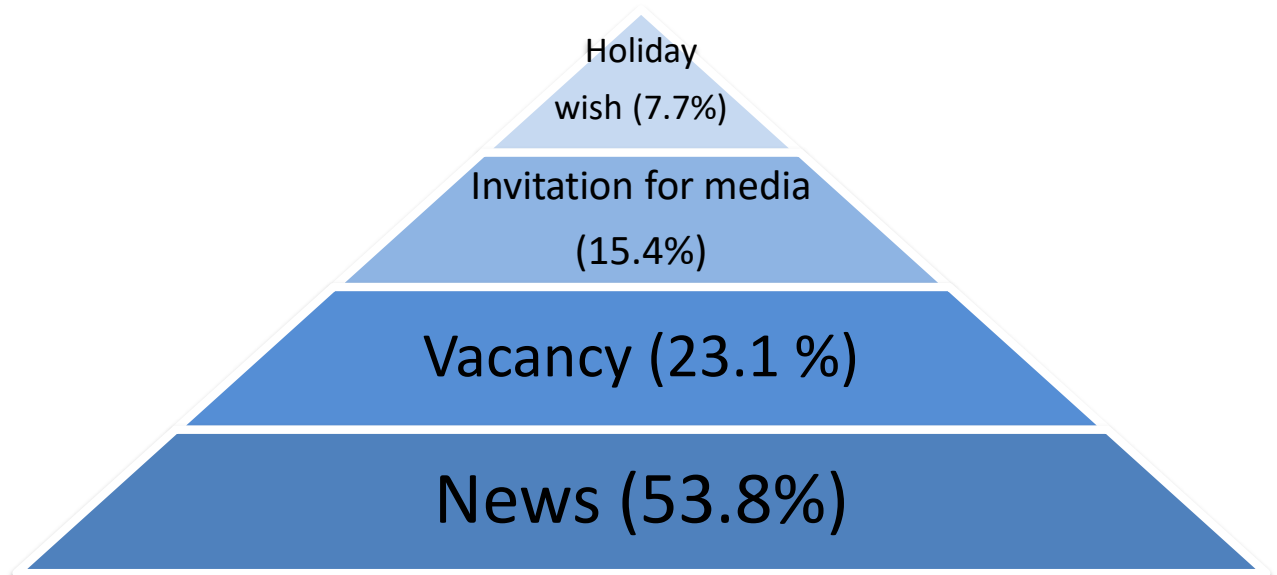
during the given period, and more than four thousand people has like, give comments and share those contents (posts).

Table 2: Content review of EAF's Facebook page from 03 May, 2021 to 30 May, 2021

| Content | Date posted | Category | No. of likes, share and comments (In a week time) | Total engagement (monthly) |
|--|--------------|------------------|---|----------------------------|
| ክፍት የሥራ መደብ ማስታወቂያ ሚያዝያ 25/2013 ዓ.ም | 03 May, 2021 | Vacancy | 390 | 9598 |
| የጋዜጣዊ መግለጫ ጥሪ ለስፖርት ሚዲያ አካላት፤ | 04 May, 2021 | Media invitation | 535 | 8509 |
| ለስፖርት መገናኛ ብዙሀን በሙሉ፤ የኢትዮጵያ አትሌቲክስ ፌዴሬሽን ለሚያዚያ 28/2013 በሽራተን አዲስ ከጠዋቱ 4:00 ላይ የቶኪዮ 2020 አሊምፒክ ዝግጅትን አስመልክቶ ጋዜጣዊ መግለጫ ለመስጠት መጥራቱ ይታወሳል። ነገር ግን በአንዳንድ ሁኔታዎች አለመመቻቸት ምክንያት የጠራውን ጋዜጣዊ መግለጫ ላልተወሰነ ጊዜ የተረዘመ መሆኑን ከይቅርታ ጋር እንገልጻለን። | 05 May, 2021 | News | 236 | 3795 |
| የኢትዮጵያ አትሌቲክስ ፌዴሬሽን ከባህልና ቱሪዝም ሚኒስቴር፤ ከኢ.ፌ.ዲ.ሪ.ስፖርት ኮሚሽንና ከኢትዮጵያ አሊምፒክ ኮሚቴ ጋር በጋራ የተጠራ ጋዜጣዊ መግለጫ፡- | 07 May, 2021 | Media invitation | 285 | 3150 |
| ኢትዮጵያዊቷ አትሌት ጉዳፍ ፀጋዬ በ10,000 ሜትር የመጀመሪያ የውድድር ተሳትፎዋ ፈጣን ሰዓት በማስመዘገብ አሸናፊች | 09 May, 2021 | News | 142 | 1147 |
| አስቸኳይ ክፍት የስራ ማስታወቂያ | 10 May, 2021 | Vacancy | 77 | 1349 |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------|----------------|------|------|
| የቶኪዮ 2020 ኦሎምፒክ የአትሌቲክስ ዝግጅትን አስመልክቶ ጋዜጣዊ መግለጫ ተሰጠ። | 11 May, 2021 | News | 485 | 1112 |
| ለመላው የእስልምና እምነት ተከታዮች በሙሉ እንኳን ለ1442ኛው ዓ.ድ አልፈጥር በዓል በሰላም አደረሳችሁ። | 13 May, 2021 | Holiday wishes | 75 | 1051 |
| ለቶኪዮ 2020 ኦሎምፒክ ሃገራችን ከ800 ሜትር አስከ 10000 ሜትር እንዲሁም 3000 ሜትር መሰናክልን ጨምሮ ጁን 08/2021 በኔዘርላንድ፣ ሄንግሎ በሚደረገው የማጣሪያ ውድድር ሃገራችንን በመወከል የሚሳተፉ እጩ አትሌቶች የመጨረሻ ምርጫ ይደረጋል። | 18 May, 2021 | News | 1155 | 1406 |
| ትላንት ግንቦት 11/2013 ዓ.ም. አመሻሽ ላይ በቼክ ሪፐብሊክ አስትራቫ ከተማ በተካሄደ የኮንትኔንታል ቱር ውድድር ወርልድ ሊዲንግ 8:09.47 በሆነ ሰዓት የ3000 ሜትር መሰናክል ውድድርን አትሌት ጌትነት ዋሌ አሸነፈ። | 21 May 2021 | News | 177 | 2071 |
| የክፍት ስራ መደብ ማስታወቂያ | 21 May, 2021 | Vacancy | 68 | 2101 |
| በስፔን፣ አጁራ ትናንት ምሽት በተካሄደ የአለም አትሌቲክስ የነሀስ አህጉራዊ ሚቲንግ ውድድር አትሌቶቻችን አሸነፉ። | 23 May, 2021 | News | 529 | 2405 |
| ትላንት በዶሀ፣ ኳታር በተደረገ የዳይመንድ ሊግ ውድድር በ3000 ሜትር መሠናክል ኢትዮጵያዊቷ አትሌት መቅደስ አበበ 9:02.52 በሆነ ሰዓት 2ኛ ደረጃ ይዞ ስታጠናቅቅ በውድድሩ የገባችበት ሰዓት የኢትዮጵያ የርቀቱ ሪከርድ ሆኖ ተመዝግቧል። | 29 May, 2021 | News | 174 | 917 |

Figure 8: Content summary for EAF's Facebook posts of May 2021



The above figure shows that news is the most dominant content on the federation's page having more than half of the total shares, and not only the contents but also took the highest share on engagements (actions taken by users on the posts).

The presence of people who had any content from or about the entire page including posts, check-ins, ads, social information from people who interact with is one of the engagement metrics.

4.3. Discussion

The primary objective of the research undertaken is to investigate how the public relations practitioners are using the social media platforms, and to review the impacts of social media on PR and communication activities of the Ethiopian Athletics Federation. The findings of this study showed that there is no communications strategy in general and digital communication strategy in particular at the EAF.

Thus, there is a misunderstanding of the purpose of social media as a PR and communication tool, and yet the attitude towards social media remains backward. This has clearly misled the overall activities of the department and creates an ambiguity over what, when and how to communicate.

The lack of organizational resources seems to be heightened by the lack of knowledge and expertise of the fundamental aspects of social media and its benefits (outcomes) by EAF's employees that took part in the qualitative interviews. Despite the fact that the Facebook page has thousands of followers, its activities and impacts have never been measured.

According to the researcher's observation and the findings of the interviews, social media contents have never been developed in a creative and highly innovative way as it should be. This might have been because of the limitation in capacity of the communication department or the federation's perception towards social media itself.

Having the world's greatest athletes and successful coaches could have been a unique selling point for EAF's social media presence and in the development of its contents. Social media pages of similar federations and association's use to present personal stories of young, successful or veteran athletes of the given country, and EAF doesn't do the same.

Because people love to hear human interest stories but there is none in any of EAF's social media accounts, Ethiopian athletics fans could only get the stories of Ethiopian athletes on some other websites and social media accounts of foreign based institutions like World Athletics, LetsRun.com, etc... Therefore, personal stories of the athletics community could have been one segment of the social media accounts, and it could have brought more followers and create a better platform for the fans to get to know the athletics community more.

In diffusion theory, target audiences have to be well understood and explained how a group of people views a new idea, behavior or product. This could help a social media manager create all contents in accordance with the interest of its public and the character of the platform it operates. Also the contents of EAF are intended to be informative the PR team cannot assure whether it reaches the targeted group of audience or not, because it is yet to be defined.

In addition, all contents (posts) are framed in a similar pattern; the federation's PR department hasn't developed any tailor made contents for a specific target group to be addressed. For instance: a message or an announcement made for the media may not be as relevant as it is for the athletes or coaches, or the same goes for any public statement addressing the government offices.

Diffusion theory also promotes understanding of the population and particularly its own audience, and classifying it into groups in order to make decisions that could lead to have a successful outreach. But in EAF's case large numbers of audiences are merged altogether, and no particular group is receiving personalized contents.

As it was discussed with the interviewees, the linguistic limitation has also been a constraint in reaching a large number of audiences throughout the world.

Regardless of having an account and being inactive on the social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Telegram, the posts on its Facebook page aren't always timely and some contents are found to be inaccurate.

The interview participants have mentioned that Ethiopians use Facebook like no other social media platforms, and the federation's PR & communication has focused on the given network. But recent growth in number of users is seen on Telegram, Twitter and Instagram, which can be considered as lively options to EAF. However, the federation's personnel need to understand the differences of all the platforms, the users and communicate accordingly.

Dialogic theory, states that PR activities are expected to interact with the public (the organization's target audience) honestly and ethically. In addition to this, interface needs to be accessible and generate an interest on visitors to a return visit. Further more; the information provided needs to be relevant for a variety of publics.

Every social network offers different engagement touch points, which is why PR personnel may have to calculate engagement differently for each social media channel. With the presence of weekly and monthly reports from the social media platforms, measuring the engagements with a given metrics helps communication experts to identify if their message or post is resonating with the target audience, and also gives a glimpse into how the organization's image and services are perceived by potential users.

As stated in the introduction part of this thesis, a social media communications need to have a collaboration, conversation and community, but yet EAF lacks almost all of these characters.

Even if the federation's marketing team is along with its PR and communications department, much hasn't been done to promote and enhance the brand of EAF and

Ethiopian athletics itself. This was due to its lesser amount of social media presence and the inability to build a reputation.

In reality the employees are responsible for dealing with the social media, particularly with the challenge of constant evolution and change. However, through the process of trial and error, over time employees of EAF are expected to learn how to use the new function or platform and in turn will be able to manage change more efficiently,

Chapter Five Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The Ethiopian Athletics Federation is one of the nation's leading organization in the country's sports profile. It is the only Federation that has athletes that without fail bring prestige, by winning medals, to the country. However, this power and influence have not further been emphasized with the use of social media. This being said, the research paper has identified key issues with the knowledge, utilization and purpose of social media use by the EAF PR personnel.

The first aim of the study is to identify the use social media by EAF PR personnel. Five social media channels have been identified as means of transmitting the messages of the EAF. However, it is important to note that while social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and Instagram may come and go, the underlying technology and the convenience of accessing that technology makes social media crucial tool for sport organizations. This means, EAF PR personnel need to keep updating themselves on new trends in the technology as it relates to the audiences they want to reach in order to cope with the changing landscape and the ever-growing demand and need of information.

The second aim of the study is to identify how and why EAF PR use social media. It has been identified that there is some level of use, however, the EAF PR use of social media needs to be aligned to the larger goal of the organization. The Federation PR need clarity on the overall objectives of why they are using social media. At present, the study reveals that the organization is only focused on using the social media platforms as a means to

disseminate mass information (which in reality can be obtained from other local media outlets as well as competing organizations) such as results and upcoming events, squad selection. That is to say there is a lack of intentional and strategic use of the social media platforms.

Two important use of social media by organization are building brand reputation (institutional reputation) and generating income. These two elements are a missed opportunity as the EAF PR are not considering the two as important factors while using the social media platforms. Increasing the visibility of the Federation opens the line for better sponsorship and partnerships, which is a line of income for the Federation. Additionally, this in turn has the ability to increase the power and influence of the federation. This also has an important implication for the nation as a means of promoting the country. However, as mentioned above, the lack of active and intentional use of the social media platforms by the Federation is a missed opportunity.

Finally, the third aim of the study is to understand how social media is changing the EAF PR personnel perception and use of social media. As the study indicates, one major underlying problem is the lack of neither guidance, proper documented communications strategy nor a social media/digital strategy. Lacking proper roadmap as to the communications need or an organization can be confusing, which ultimately leads to frustration, which can result in crisis. It is because there is a lack of guidance, that there is need for approval from senior management on all communications released on social media. This also in its own way limits creativity and innovation as well as motivation to ensure proper communication is conveyed to the right audience in the right channel.

Understanding this, the EAF PR need proper and continual training on the social media landscape, use and utilization in order to maximize the results of social media use and ultimately reap the benefits of social media.

The power and influence of social media continues to strengthen and shows no decline. While all sectors have been in one way or another affected by social media arguably the sports sector is one of the most affected fields. The sports industry addresses a wide range of audiences and thus social media being one of the main ways to address mass is an influential tool.

This being said the it is important for PR personnel in sports organizations to leverage on the multitude of advantages these platforms offer with care and caution as social media comes with its own set of problems that can cause major communication crisis and reputation damage. Increasingly sports consumption has boosted demand for all kinds of sports media and information, and the growth is not showing any signs of slowing down in the coming years, The struggle now is managing the overwhelming demand for information, competition in controlling the narratives as organizations lose control of the type and kind of information released.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations were suggested so as to use social media as a PR and communications tool at the Ethiopian athletics federation and presented as follows:

- The federation needs to build an organizational communications strategy in general and a digital media communications strategy (a guideline) in particular.
- The federation should fully understand the advantages of social media and need to clearly identify its stakeholders and communicate accordingly.
- With the limited resource and knowledge of the social media landscape the Federation should analysis and select the most appropriate channel that will have the best result for its communication.
- Social media publications and communication of the federation shouldn't be restricted to making announcements or releasing news, rather it should be a two-way symmetrical communication with its own community and others.
- Building a good brand image needs to be one of the priorities of the federation. This will further enhance the visibility of the Federation as well as in order to easily attract sponsors and increase its revenue.
- The Federation needs to provide training for its employees to further enhance their capacity on communications, use of digital media, and social media management.
- There needs to be designated personnel to administer all the federation's social media pages, and the department needs to be independent and have the freedom to create and publish stories.
- Contents for social media should be developed, designed and placed in respect to the type (behavior) of the platform.
- All the social media accounts need to be active and verified, and get the blue badge in order to establish trust and credibility with its audiences.

- Regular reports need to be done to fully understand the social media outreach, and all the impacts it has.

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Annex-one

Interview questions for EAF's PR personnel Interview questions to EAF's PR personnel

የፌዴሬሽኑ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ዲፓርትመንት አወቃቀር ምን ይመስላል? (የሰራተኞች ብዛት የትምህርት ደረጃ ፣ የስራ ልምድ ፣ የዕድሜ እና ስነ-ምግባር ፣ ተጨማሪ ስልጠናዎች ፣ ወዘተ...)

የፌዴሬሽኑ ውስጣዊ እና ከባለ ድርሻ አካላት ጋር ያለውን ግንኙነት የሚያከናውንባቸው መንገዶች ምንድን ናቸው?

የፈጠራቸውን ግንኙነቶች / ምልልሶች ለማጣቀሻ / ለማስረጃ ያስቀምጣሉ?

ሶሻል ሚዲያ (ማህበራዊ ሚዲያ) ላንተ ምንድነው ፣ በይበልጥ የየትኛው ፕሮግራም ተጠቃሚ ነህ?

እንደ ፌዴሬሽኑ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ባለሙያነትስ ለማህበራዊ ሚዲያው ያለህ አተያይ ምን ይመስላል?

የኢ.አ.ፌ. ምን ያህል የማህበራዊ ሚዲያው ተጠቃሚ ነው / በየትኛዎቻቸው አማራጮች ላይ ይገኛል?

ማህበራዊ ሚዲያውን ለምን ለምን አገልግሎት ትጠቀሙበታላችሁ?

የፌዴሬሽኑ ማህበራዊ ሚዲያ መልዕክቶች ተደራሽነታቸው ለማን ነው?

ፌስቡክን ከሌሎቹ ማህበራዊ ሚዲያ አማራጮች በተለየ ተመራጭ ያደረጋችሁበት ምክንያት ምንድን ነው?
በጥናት የተደገፈ ምክንያት አለው ወይ?

ሌሎቹን የማህበራዊ ሚዲያ አማራጮች በደንብ መጠቀም ያልቻላችሁበት ምክንያት ምንድን ነው?

ፌዴሬሽኑ በሚገባው ያህል ተከታዮች አሉት ብላችሁ ታስባላችሁ?

ከሚዲያው በተጨማሪ አትሌቶች ፣ አሰልጣኞች ፣ የክልል እና የክለብ አመራሮች ምን ያህል ይከተሏችሁ?

ማህበራዊ ሚዲያው ላይ በሚለጠፉ ጉዳዮች እና በማህበራዊ ሚዲያ ተሳትፏችሁ ዙሪያ አስተያየቶችን እና ምልክታዎችን ከባለድርሻዎች ታገኛላችሁ?

በእናንተ የማህበራዊ ሚዲያ አጠቃቀም ውስጥ ፈታኑ ነገር ምንድን ነው?

የክፍሉ ሰራተኞች በሙያ ብቃት ደረጃ ምን ላይ ናችሁ? የቴክኖሎጂ ስልጠናዎች ወይም የባለሙያ ድጋፍ ተደርጎላቸው ያውቃል?

Annex-two

Interview questions for stakeholders (journalist, athlete and coach)

1. Describe your profession and years of experience?
2. Do you follow the Ethiopian Athletics Federation's social media page?

If yes, which one? If no, why?

3. Why (for what purpose) do you visit the EAF's facebook page? How often?
4. You think it's worth visiting? (Do you find the information you get o EAF's social media pages relevant?)
5. In your opinion, has the presence of social media smoothen the communication between EAF and its stakeholders; particularly with the media?
6. What do you think are the limitations of the pages or what it really lacks?
7. Comparing to other institutions or federation, what should EAF's communication department do in order to improve its presence on social media?