#AntiPoaching

NGOs' social media use in the battle against poaching in Africa

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Abstract

Although the number of social media users, including NGOs, continues to rise worldwide, studies focusing on how NGOs use social media are limited. Previous research is generally quantitative in nature and focuses more on <u>whether</u> NGOs use social media and less on <u>how</u> they use it. Further, these studies generally focus on the larger NGOs in the West. Therefore, there is a gap in existing literature about NGOs in the developing parts of the world, such as Africa. As poaching continues to be a serious and imminent threat to some of the world's most iconic animals, it is particularly interesting to research this understudied niche of NGOs focusing on (anti-)poaching in Africa. More precisely, this research investigates in what ways NGOs communicate about (anti-)poaching in Africa on Facebook and Instagram and what content is most salient on their social media platforms. In addition, this study examines how these NGOs invite engagement on their platforms and what posts elicit more engagement.

As this research looks at how NGOs use social media, focusing on the NGOs Facebook and Instagram content, a qualitative research approach was chosen. A thematic content analysis of 653 Facebook posts and 354 Instagram posts, from six different NGOs focusing on (anti-)poaching in Africa, was done.

This study contributes to existing literature on how NGOs use social media by adding valuable knowledge about an understudied region and cause. It builds on existing theories by pointing out that these NGOs use five different communication strategies, ranging from information to activating, community building, asserting effectiveness and eliciting emotion. Although most posts are related to information, messages trying to activate and build a community were also frequently used. In addition, more in-depth knowledge about social media content is provided by discussing what content is most salient on these NGOs platforms. In concludes, these NGOs use visuals in nearly all their posts and use popular language and online trends, as well as digital features.

Moreover, by examining how NGOs invite engagement, this study enhances knowledge about online stakeholder engagement in the NGO context. The research shows that, contrary to existing literature, most NGOs use different ways to invite engagement, such as appealing for donations via the special donate feature on Facebook and try to elicit online dialogue via questions and comments. Lastly, this study deepens the understanding of what types of posts elicit more engagement. It demonstrates that posts which try to elicit emotion

receive significantly more engagement on Facebook than the other categories and – surprisingly – that posts which are informative in nature elicit most engagement on Instagram. This knowledge could potentially be interesting for NGOs wishing to create more engagement on their social media. Lastly, the limitations and directions for future research are mentioned.

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Keywords

Africa, NGOs poaching, social media, stakeholder engagement.

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Preface

If we do not do something to prevent it, Africa's animals, and the places in which they live, will be lost to our world, and her children, forever. Before it is too late, we need your help to lay the foundation that will preserve this precious legacy long after we are gone.

– Nelson Mandela

Back in 1997, Nelson Mandela expressed his concern about the future of African animals. Sadly, this quote is still highly relevant today. He has passed away and will not be able to protect them further. Nevertheless, other efforts are working hard to safeguard wildlife and are trying to prevent Africa's animals from being lost to our world forever.

My passion for African wildlife and the imminent threat of poaching in this region, were the main motivations for this thesis. In addition, I was inspired by certain NGOs' anti-poaching efforts and encouraged by this year's classes to look into the alleged power of social media.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who supported me throughout writing my thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Vidhi Chaudhri, for her guidance, time and valuable feedback. Furthermore, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support throughout this process. Moreover, I would like to give a special thanks to my boyfriend for his help and continued encouragements.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge and thank all the employees and volunteers of the anti-poaching NGOs for their continued efforts to save African animals.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2015, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) launched a new campaign called #EndangeredEmoji. This social media campaign aimed to get more donations for endangered species by urging WWF's Twitter followers to tweet emojis of endangered animals (WWF, 2015). It was the first time WWF used social media to generate donations and create brand awareness in this way and resulted in more than 1 million tweets using the hashtag and 59.000 donations in the first two months (Mortimer, 2015; Keady, 2017). In 2018, Greenpeace launched their "Rang-tan" video online, asking people to sign a petition to stop the use of palm oil by large corporates (Medea, 2018). This animated video showed scenes of a young orangutan causing mischief in a little girl's bedroom, followed by images portraying harrowing memories of the orangutan as her forest was destroyed and her mother was killed. This video immediately went viral and resulted in likes, shares and 30 million views across social media. Moreover, three months after the launch the petition already had over 621.000 signatures (Ibrahim, 2018). In terms of virality this campaign definitely reaped the benefits of social media and created more awareness about the use of palm oil.

With more than half of the world's population using the internet and 45% of the global population active on social media platforms (Kemp, 2019), it is becoming increasingly important for organisations to be aware of the affordances of these social media. It is a medium that bypasses traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television (Guo & Saxton, 2014) and offers a platform for direct engagement with stakeholders (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Social media no longer just facilitate people's communication with friends and family, combined they constitute a global network which is enabling people to connect, (co-)create and activate (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As the examples illustrate, social media can provide opportunities 'to do good' and can truly activate people - even though this sometimes means just hitting the 'like' button or posting an emoji. It enables organisations to spread their message to a very large audience fast and at a relatively low cost (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017; Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, this medium is particularly promising for non-governmental organisations or NGOs.

Before the rise of the Web 2.0, NGOs were confined to traditional media and restricted to certain outlets to promote their cause and connect with followers. Today, social media are allegedly changing the game with respect to NGOs' media presence, financial resources and engagement with followers (Nah & Saxton, 2012). Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean all global issues are now being "solved" by social media. NGOs face major

challenges with regard to reaching their target audience and social media utilization (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012; Raja-Yusof, Norman, Abdul-Rahman, Nazri & Yusoff, 2016). Moreover, not all causes get equal attention from NGOs.

This thesis aims to understand more about one such underrepresented topic: how NGOs use social media for their battle against poaching in Africa. Motivated by a particular interest in the (anti-)poaching issues in Africa and the potential challenges faced by NGOs, this master thesis will examine the following research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways do NGOs communicate about (anti-)poaching in Africa on Facebook and Instagram?

RQ 2: What content is most salient on anti-poaching NGOs' social media platforms?

RQ 3: How do NGOs invite engagement on their platforms about this issue and what posts elicit more engagement?

1.1.   Societal relevance

Africa is home to some of the world's most iconic animals. Sadly, poaching, defined as the illegal hunting of wildlife (Von Essen, Hansen, Nordström Källström, Peterson & Peterson, 2014), has been an ongoing issue for African countries for decades. If poaching is not treated as an imminent threat, some of these iconic animals will soon become extinct (Büscher, 2015). Large-scale commercial poaching occurs predominantly in the large nature reserves in the southern and eastern parts of the African continent (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009). Here, wildlife tourism is thriving and it is a major source of income (Lindsey, Alexander, Mills, Romañach & Woodroffe, 2009). Therefore, the preservation of wildlife is not only an ethical issue, but also an economic one.

Certain wildlife species are targeted more than others and are now under severe threat from a new wave of poaching driven by profit. In one decade the number of illegally killed rhinos went from 13 to over 1000 per year (Save the Rhino, 2018). In 2018, the statistics showed some progress as the killings decreased to 769 killed rhinos that year. Nevertheless, with an average of two rhinos being poached a day (Save the Rhino, 2018) this number still remains too high. South Africa is particularly important with regards to the rhino poaching issue, as it is it home to 75% of the world's remaining rhinos (Massé, 2019). The poaching problem has been an ongoing struggle for South Africa and anti-poaching efforts have increased significantly over the years. But the problem remains, as the demand for rhino horn

from Asian and Arab countries is growing and the financial rewards for poachers are huge ($60.000 per kilo) (Business Live, 2018). Kruger National Park, which is home to about 40% of South Africa's rhinos, shares a direct border with Mozambique and has been targeted most. Here, professional anti-poaching units set up to protect the animals and well-organised criminal poaching syndicates financed from abroad, are fighting a full blown war, resulting in animal and human casualties. As poaching is such a lucrative trade, more and more people are becoming involved on a local level, making it even harder to police (Büscher & Ramutsindela, 2015).

Elephants, too, are being targeted again. Although an international ivory ban came into effect in 1989, which did help in the battle against elephant poaching (Lemieux & Clarke, 2009), there has been an increase in the illegal ivory trade. In May this year, Botswana decided to lift their ban on elephant hunting, legalising this practice and contributing to the global elephant loss (BBC, 2019). Overall, the retargeting of elephants has resulted in an 8% annual drop in the African elephant population and if nothing is done about it, this could halve the population within a decade (Massé, 2019). Furthermore, other species including the cheetah, the pangolin, the African wild dog, the lion and the gorilla are also under severe threat (African Wildlife Foundation, e.d.).

1.2. Academic relevance

Many efforts have already been made to create awareness at a global and local level and to provide these anti-poaching units with the equipment they need. Although governments and private individuals have played a role, NGOs have been most active. NGOs' efforts include the use of social media to spread their message and make the world more aware of their causes. Therefore, this has become an interesting field of research for communication and (social) media experts. The rapidly changing landscape of social media makes research about this topic quite challenging, as it has to adapt to this speed of developments and be flexible.

In the past, studies focussing on NGOs and social media use have therefore focused more on <u>whether</u> NGOs used social media and to a lesser extent on <u>how</u> they use it (Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007; Seo, Kim & Yang, 2009; Nah & Saxton, 2012). In addition, there is also a lack of literature about NGOs' engagement on social media. Authors note that this is probably related to the fact that it is difficult to truly measure engagement (Xu & Saxton, 2019, Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017; Ihm, 2015) and that is quite a new phenomenon within the

NGO context (Xu & Saxton, 2019). In addition, most studies predominantly focus on the larger non-profit organizations, because they have more easily accessible data (Nah & Saxton, 2012; Saxton & Waters; 2014; Saxton, Niyirora, Guo & Waters; 2015). This leaves a gap in literature about smaller NGOs and their use of social media. Furthermore, most studies about this topic are quantitative in nature. They use statistics to measure whether and how NGOs use social media and do not go into depth about the content. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the content in more depth. Finally, most studies focus on the social media platforms which are most popular among NGOs, such as Facebook and Twitter (Nah & Saxton, 2012; Saxton & Waters; 2014; Saxton, Niyirora, Guo & Waters; 2015) and do not shed light on new and rapidly developing platforms such as Instagram.

      Another challenge is that little research has been conducted on the use of social media within the developing world (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017). Whereas a decade ago social media were not as prevalent in these parts of the world (Poushter, Bishop & Chwe, 2018), over the last years the number of mobile devices and internet access on mobile devices has thrived in developing areas such as the African continent (Kemp, 2018). Therefore, we have now reached a stage where studying the use and effect of social media in the developing world has become possible and necessary. In addition, there is a lack of empirical data on examining the impact of social media on NGOs in South Africa specifically (Nchabeleng, Botha & Bisschoff, 2018). Lastly, there is barely any literature on how NGOs are using social media in their battle against poaching (Messé, 2019). Some studies have focused on how technology is helping anti-poaching efforts, focusing on how technology is helping biologists monitor nature (Joppa, 2015), the concept of green militarization (Luntstrom, 2014) and the use of drones for (anti-)poaching efforts (Pázmány, Stolper, van Essen, Negro & Sassen, 2013). However, they do not focus on social media in particular.

      In summary, by aiming to find out in what ways NGOs communicate about this issue on Facebook and Instagram, what content is most salient on these platforms, how they invite engagement and what posts elicit more engagement, specifically focusing on the underrepresented niche of (anti-)poaching in Africa, this thesis aims to provide insights into a number of academically relevant questions that have so far remained understudied. The qualitative analysis will provide more in-depth information than the statistical approach usually chosen. The focus on Africa will contribute to more knowledge about the use and effects of social media in (one part of) the developing world, which has so far rarely been

researched. Finally, social media and (anti-)poaching has, to the researcher's knowledge, not been studied at all.

This thesis is structured as follows. Following the previous section, an in-depth overview of the existing literature on the topic is provided to investigate what has already been written and to give a summary of existing knowledge. Firstly, key concepts used in this thesis are defined. Secondly, existing literature on the relevance of social media for NGOs are discussed. Thirdly, the different ways in which NGOs use social media are summarized. Lastly, an overview of existing literature on online stakeholder engagement is provided. After this, the methodology chapter explains how this thesis researches NGOs' social media usage by discussing the research design and chosen method. Then, the relevant results are presented and discussed through the proposed theoretical framework. Lastly, all significant findings are discussed and presented in the conclusion, as well as the limitations of this study and the suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical concepts

To understand fully how NGOs use social media for (anti-)poaching, this chapter provides an overview of existing academic work and the subsequent theoretical concepts. It is divided into four main parts, each covering one of the research questions of this study. Firstly, the important concepts for this study are explained and defined. Secondly, the relevance of social media for NGOs is discussed. This is followed by an outline of existing literature on how NGOs use social media to communicate. Lastly, an overview of existing literature on NGOs' online stakeholder engagement is provided.

2.1. Defining the concepts

Within the framework of this thesis, the terms NGOs, social media and (anti-)poaching are frequently used. The term NGO was first coined by the United Nations (UN) in the 1950s describing it as: "Any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, the environment or health" (United Nations, 1998, para. 1). It has since been defined by many authors (Hudson & Bielefeld, 1997; Yaziji & Doh, 2009). However, for this research the definition provided by Teegen, Doh & Vachani (2004) will be used. They refer to NGOs as: "private, not-for-profit organizations that aim to serve particular societal interests by focusing on advocacy and/or operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection and human rights" (Teegen et al., 2004, p. 464).

Over the past decades, NGOs have evolved to become part of the global economy. They are no longer seen as small groups of harmless activists, but have become sophisticated organizations that influence society (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). In the Western world in particular, they have often acquired a higher level of trust from the public than other organizations, including corporations and even governments (Wootliff & Deri, 2001). The term NGO is used interchangeably with the term non-profit, as for both profit is not their purpose. This purpose also relates to their employees, which generally consists people who help the

organisation on voluntary basis (Alonso-Canadas, Galan-Valdivieso, Saraite-Sariene & Caba-Perez, 2019). There are different types of NGOs, the main ones being advocacy NGOs, including watchdogs and social movement NGOs, service NGOs and hybrid or evolving NGOs (Yaziji & Doh, 2009).

Social media can be defined as: "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). There are many different forms of social media, ranging from media sharing sites and blogging sites to online communities and social networking sites (SNS) (Ngai et al., 2015). This research will focus on SNSs, defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a system, state a list of other users with whom they want to connect and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017, p. 5). Furthermore, this thesis will research SNSs used by NGOs. Examples of SNSs are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

2.2. Social media's relevance to NGOs

NGOs generally only achieve their objectives if they are able to influence large groups in society. Therefore communication platforms have always been of importance to them. When NGOs started to develop in the 1960s, traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television were important channels, being the only ways NGOs could spread their message and engage with the public (Guo & Saxton, 2014). These channels controlled their own content and could therefore be reluctant in helping NGOs get exposure. However, new ways of communicating with large audiences evolved with the rise of the Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 and made it possible for NGOs to circumvent traditional media and even transcend national borders (Seo, Kim & Yang, 2009). The Web 1.0 refers to the period in which the Internet and, consequently, websites developed and became popular for organisations to use (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2014). Previous studies have therefore focused on NGOs' use of websites in this era (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007). All found that NGOs were not using the websites as strategic and interactive tools to engage with stakeholders (Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007; Seo et al., 2009). Seo et al., (2009) also showed that websites were NGOs' most important tool, but underlined the fact that most NGOs stated they were reallocating resources away from websites towards social networking sites, specifically mentioning Facebook and Twitter.

The growing availability of high-speed internet access lead to the rise of the Web 2.0. The term 'Web 2.0' was first coined by Tom O'Reilly in 2004. It refers to the type of website where people can retrieve, share, write and store information (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014; Ngai, Moon, Lam & Tao, 2015). The Web 2.0 provided the platform from which social media could develop. Social media, in turn, provide numerous opportunities for NGOs. As non-profit organisations, they generally have limited financial resources or are dependent on certain other resources (such as donations) (Sharma, 2010). Therefore NGOs benefit from network involvement and are always looking out for opportunities which are cost effective (Wootliff & Deri, 2001). Social media are relatively cheap and form a global network.

Some NGOs are already using certain affordances of social media. In 2015, following the WWF example, WaterAid launched their #GiveaShit campaign, creating an app in which the 'poop emoji' could be customized and used on social media. Via this campaign they raised awareness about the serious issue of 2.3 billion people around the world who do not have access to safe and sanitary toilets (WaterAid, 2015). Their campaign generated 230 million media impressions as it went viral. Ultimately, it generated donations to the cause and brought 11.000 new supporters to WaterAid (Shoaff, 2015; WaterAid, 2015). In addition, other causes are starting to use influencers on social media to promote their mission. In 2016, Knot On My Planet, a NGO which focuses on reducing elephant poaching for ivory, started collaborating with Dutch model Doutzen Kroes (Knot On My planet, 2019) who has around six million followers on Instagram. This collaboration resulted in more awareness among her fanbase as she has become a true ambassador for the cause. She posts content related to Knot On My Planet, spreading awareness and encouraging people to donate (i-D Staff, 2018; Weaver, 2016). In that same year, Wild Aid started collaborating with Angelababy, a Chinese actress, model and influencer who has around 74 million (!) followers on Weibo and 7.1 million followers on Instagram (Koetse, 2018), to spread awareness about the pangolin poaching problem and to target the Chinese market in particular (Vallianos, 2016). The examples above provide an illustration of existing attempts by NGOs to raise awareness of the issue and show that social media can reach millions of people and potentially mobilize them.

In addition, in the Western world in particular, NGOs have acquired a higher level of trust from the public than other organizations, including corporations and even governments (Sharma, 2010; Saxton & Guo, 2011). They are perceived by the public as more trustworthy

because they serve a social purpose and their aim is non-financial. Moreover, they are perceived as being transparent, because they do not only inform people about the good news, but also discuss the bad news (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). Some authors have attributed this level of trust to the effective ways NGOs use images, particularly online, to convey their message (Wootliff & Deri, 2001). As social media are perceived as open platforms where everyone can voice their opinions, NGOs could potentially take advantage of this situation. Therefore, in this regard too, social media are very promising for NGOs (Seo et al., 2009).

Moreover, authors state we have now reached the point where NGOs face an ever growing urge to be online, as the global Internet users have increased by 350 million people this year alone and stakeholders expect NGOs to be online (Waters & Feneley, 2013; Kemp, 2019). Therefore, not being online could lead to loss of potential supporters, volunteers and donors, as well as being perceived as outdated by the public at large (Waters & Feneley, 2013).

2.3. NGOs' communication strategies on social media

Besides discussing the relevance of social media to NGOs, it is important to understand what previous research has found with regards to how NGOs use social media. Therefore, this section reflects on the different communication strategies that have been found while analysing NGOs social media usage in previous studies.

Previous research about NGOs and social media have focused more on whether NGOs used social media. These studies generally focussed on the platforms that have been around for some time now, such as Facebook (Greenberg & MacAuley, 2009; Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, Lucas, 2009; Saxton & Waters, 2014), Twitter (Barres & Mattson, 2010; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton; 2012) and to a lesser extent on YouTube (Auger, 2013) and Instagram (Ysof, Norman, Abdul-Rahman, Nazri & Yusoff; 2016).

Besides studying which platforms NGOs use, a few studies have also focused on how NGOs use social media. Briones et al., (2011) conducted a study which found that the American Red Cross uses different affordances of social media to truly engage with their followers. But they are an exception. Most NGOs use these media for purely informational purposes (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2012). Information, as the term suggests, refers to content that is disseminated from the NGO for purely informational purposes and without a secondary agenda (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). These results were also

found by researchers who performed a broader study of the non-profit sector: NGOs failed to use their Facebook for interaction with stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009).

Aside from informational purposes, NGOs also use social media for advocacy purposes (Auger, 2013), referred to as the attempt to persuade people of their mission or goal using the affordances of this medium. This research focussing on advocacy also concluded that it was generally done via one-way communication (Auger, 2013). More recent studies have opened up the debate about the use of hashtags for advocacy purposes (Saxton, Niyirora, Gup & Waters, 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019) but this this is still quite a new phenomenon within this field of research.

Other social media studies concerning NGOs have found that NGOs are also using social media for community building (Saxton et al., 2015; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Community building posts have been described as messages that serve to engage and bind followers and users to the NGO and foster relationships (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Although community building has been mentioned as a separate category within communication strategies, authors stress that the potential community has first been developed through informational posts before actually becoming a valuable community of the NGO (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). These studies primarily focus on how NGOs build relationships and how they create networks via social media. Guo & Saxton (2014) developed a model of "mobilisation-driven-relationship-building", which analysed how organizations can generate and mobilize network support through social media. These network features accommodated by social media can also provide opportunities for NGOs to reach out to potential donors and even match-make community members to these donors (Xu & Saxton, 2019).

In addition, social media could potentially provide NGOs with critical knowledge about their community, as it can be used as a 'listening post' to truly hear what their followers have to say about certain topics or the organisation itself (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012). Recent technological developments have made it possible for people to be less dependent on geographic boundaries and create virtual communities online (Ngai et al., 2015) These virtual communities provide new opportunities as they are built more on the users' sense of belonging than on their geographic position (Svensson, Mahoney & Hambrick, 2015). Studies have pointed out that these online social communities, such as Facebook groups and blogging websites, therefore provide a diverse public sphere and can catalyse public dialogue and engagement between NGOs and the public (Svensson et al., 2015).

Despite these affordances, all studies concluded that although NGOs rely on communities, they are not using social media to its full potential for this purpose (Saxton et al., 2015; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Additionally, much existing scholarship on the topic focuses on NGOs in the United States of America. Very little research has attempted to look at whether and how NGOs use social media in developing countries, outside of the West. Recent research has indicated that although the use of social media in public relations practices has increased in Africa, the adoption and implementation of social media by NGOs is still very low (Nchabeleng, 2016). In a first attempt to look at NGOs' social media use in a democratizing country, Armstrong & Butcher (2017) analyse how NGOs in Nigeria use social media. The authors found only a very small portion of their sample used social media at all and that the use of websites was more common. However, the groups that were using Twitter were utilizing it in a more interactive way than might have been expected with regards to previous literature about online stakeholder engagement by NGOs (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017) and in particular for Nigeria's context, being a developing country in a continent that has only recently become more active in the social media sphere (Kemp, 2018). Their article includes a table in which they have provided the ten different categories they found and examples of the attributed tweets. These categories constitute: information, giving thanks, acknowledging community events and asserting efficacy, soliciting dialogue, responses to others and interacting with other groups, requests for additional connections, appeals for donations, selling a product, event promotion/calls for volunteers and peripheral participation and encouragement of community engagement (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017). Nevertheless, they conclude that more than half of the tweets they analysed represented one-way communication and that the affordances provided by social media are not used effectively. Another study about NGOs social media use in Africa conducted semi-structured interviews and concluded that although there was a noticeable improvement in the use of social media, it is still not a general practice for South Africa's NGOs (Nchabeleng, Botha & Bisschoff, 2018). Their research also showed that NGOs were merely using social media platforms to disseminate information and were failing to use it for other purposes.

In contrast to the above mentioned studies, some authors concluded that NGOs do, in fact, use certain affordances of social media effectively. These studies focused on the "call to action" and fundraising opportunities of social media (Goecks, Voida, Voida & Mynatt, 2008; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2014). According to Goecks et al., (2008), social media platforms

offer direct and indirect opportunities for fundraising, with a pragmatic incentive of providing simple and accessible tools, such as a "Donate Now" button. Social media provide NGOs with the opportunity to change stakeholder's attitudes and move them to action in a way other communication outlets have not (Waters & Feneley, 2013). Other studies have found that the structure of an NGO influences the adoption of social media, concluding that NGOs relying on public donations use social media more than other types of NGOs (Nah & Saxton, 2012). Recent studies have highlighted the potential for NGOs supported by donations, or raising funds by riding on trending hashtags, such as #GivingTuesday (Xu & Saxton, 2019).

In conclusion, previous studies have detected different communication strategies used by NGOs on their social media platforms. These strategies range from providing information and advocacy purposes, to online community building and calls to action. Although some authors agree on the fact that NGOs are leveraging certain affordances provided by social media, most studies conclude that NGOs are not using all communication strategies as efficiently and are therefore falling short when it comes to social media usage.

2.3.1. Potential challenges of social media

Past studies focusing on how NGOs use social media have also teased out potential reasons for this underutilization of social media. According to the South African NGO Network (2010) lack of technology and budget play a major role in the potential underutilization of social media in this particular region. Although technology is developing rapidly in these developing regions, it is still very unreliable and can therefore bring more challenges than actual opportunities for NGOs.

In addition, although social media is perceived as a relatively low-cost medium, it imposes considerable resource constraints regarding time and expertise (Xu & Saxton, 2019). This often plays a role in more traditional NGOs who lack the expertise and will therefore have to invest a lot of (valuable) time in social media know-how. Related to this is the fact that most NGOs rely on volunteers who generally lack the ICT or social media skills necessary to use it to its full potential (Hemphill, Million & Erickson, 2018). This lack of technological knowledge is particularly present in Africa, on a management level, as well as on the employee level. Authors have therefore underlined the importance of the right guidance for social media utilization before NGOs in Africa truly start using the platforms (Nchabeleng et al., 2018) and suggest that, in general, NGOs should assign more knowledgeable staff to carry out social media strategies (Hou & Lampe, 2015). Additionally, although social media could be specifically interesting for smaller organisations given their

limited resources, advanced technology use is often not the highest priority for them (Hemphill et al., 2018) and is therefore not used efficiently.

Despite the fact that NGOs have been able to circumvent traditional media such as newspapers and television, this does not necessarily mean they are now more in control (Waters & Feneley, 2013). If posts are perceived as negative or false, social media can also become a platform that feeds negativity about the NGO and its cause (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Danyi & Chaudhri, 2018). This could pose a risk for the NGOs' reputation as everyone can voice their opinion in comments and posts (Nchabeleng et al., 2018). Another challenge of social media relates to the fact that they potentially provide the perfect channel to exploit and blow-up scandals, also with regards to NGOs (Leardini, Moggi & Rossi, 2019). This also aligns with the threat of online fake news and quality concerns regarding the online messages. In addition, in most developing countries, NGOs are not as socially accepted as they are in the West. Therefore, leaving a digital footprint can pose serious risks as this could be used against them by oppressive regimes or the general public (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019; Armstrong & Butcher, 2017). For these reasons, some NGOs might see social media as a potential threat, instead of a potential opportunity. This feeling of loss of control as a reason for leaving social media out of the equation, has been supported by different studies (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019; Nchabeleng et al., 2018; Waters & Feneley, 2013).

Furthermore, critics underline that NGOs (much like other social media users) are still dependent on large commercial organisations, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google. In this way some NGOs are even supporting large corporates online, which they are trying to combat offline. Besides being dependent on these large corporates, social media are now also heavily influenced by complex technological mechanisms, such as algorithmic selections (Poell & van Dijck, 2015). This could influence who actually sees NGO content online and is able to interact. Moreover, this could play into an unbalanced representation of viewpoints, audience fragmentation and dominance of commercial interests (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019; Xu & Saxton, 2019). The focus of research to date is generally on the front-end (how does it look), instead of the back-end (how does it work), forgetting that social media are increasingly becoming commercialised spaces (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017). Moreover, research suggests that the abundance of information on and use of social media by so many, renders it more difficult for NGOs to make their voices heard and results in (unfair) competition between NGOs and larger businesses who have the resources to engage in this struggle (Guo & Saxton, 2018). Therefore, authors argue that social media exposure for NGOs suffers from

the same limitations as traditional media posed and is still most useful for the organization with the largest resources and networks (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017). Finally, some researchers suggest that social media can also cause 'slacktivism', referred to as supporting something online but not actively contributing to the cause (Dumitrica & Felt, 2019; Danyi & Chaudhri, 2018). This noncommitment of so-called online supporters, provides yet another reason for NGOs to consider not using social media (Xu & Saxton, 2019).

To sum up, previous research has focused on many different ways in which NGOs are using social media. They discuss the potential opportunities for NGOs and the different ways NGOs communicate on their platforms and in terms of speed, reach, cost effectiveness and a variety of information sources, social media are considered to be greatly beneficial for NGOs. Nevertheless, critics warn NGOs should be aware of the potential risks. Moreover, most authors conclude that, although social media are very promising for NGOs, they are still using their platforms most for informative purposes instead of focussing on and implementing more diverse communication strategies.

2.4. Stakeholder engagement on social media

Besides discussing the ways in which NGOs communicate on their social media, another important affordance of these mediums is the ability to invite and create engagement with online stakeholders. This section discusses the concept of engagement and why it is important for NGOs. Followed by an outline of different engagement strategies.

'Engaging' is defined as: "something that draws us in, that attracts and holds our attention (Chapman, 1997, p. 3; cited in Hoefer & Twis, 2018; p. 261). The word engagement has been described as ''a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships'' (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011, p. 258) and refers to the interplay between organizations and their stakeholders. In NGO terms, engagement refers to having both an interest in the mission and goals of the NGO and actually contributing to the organization via donations or volunteering (Hoefer & Twis, 2018). Engagement has been discussed in a wide array of disciplines, ranging from psychology to organisational behaviour (Hollebeek, Glynn, Brodie, 2014). The dialogic aspect of social media is perceived as a promising concept and was first discussed by Kent & Taylor (1998) who argued that organisations should maintain the 'dialogic loop', by enabling stakeholders to actually have a conversation with organisations. Further, they should provide useful information that is interesting and relevant to their

audience and try to encourage return visits and stay connected to current users (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Moreover, more people are using social media to communicate and engage than ever before (Kemp, 2018). This is not only prevalent in private communication, but people are also using social media to communicate and connect with organisations in general (McCorkindale &DiStaso, 2014). Also, online users are becoming more demanding of online stakeholder involvement and expect organisations to be active online (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017).

In this thesis, engagement constitutes the digital interaction between NGOs and their social media followers. Although social media offer new engagement opportunities, organizations still struggle with implementing them accordingly (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Waters et al., 2009). Major challenges linked to stakeholder engagement range from building and maintaining those relationships, to actively fostering them (Xu & Saxton, 2019). For NGOs, engagement can further facilitate collective action and ultimately lead to greater impact (Aaker & Smith, 2010). This collective action is linked to the volume of people engaging. A larger volume of engagement leads to a critical mass which cannot be ignored by individuals, corporations or institutions targeted by NGOs. Therefore, engagement is regarded as potentially the most impactful opportunity for NGOs (Nah & Saxton, 2012).

In Nelson's (2019) study, she uses Kent & Tailor's dialogic theory when focusing on NGOs online stakeholder engagement (Nelson, 2019). Her study concludes that the viral nature and dialogic aspects of social media can definitely complement NGOs' marketing strategies, as it provides a platform for NGOs to disseminate mission-related content, which, in turn, can easily be shared and retweeted to reach an even larger audience (Nelson, 2019).

Another reason why online engagement is important for NGOs relates to the notion of legitimacy. Following recent scandals (such as the Oxfam Novib employee sex scandals, 2018), organisations are forced to build credibility and legitimacy (Leardini, Moggi & Rossi, 2019). Legitimacy theory proposes that there is a social contract between society and organisations that urges organisations to be perceived as legitimate (Bonsón & Ratkai, 2013). Although, this is less important for NGOs, as they are generally perceived as more trustworthy, this still plays a role in their online presence. As NGOs have grown in size, number and importance, they are compelled to address issues and scandals, offline as well as online (Leardini et al., 2019). Related to this is the urge for transparency. Transparency is affiliated with being honest and open, reporting the bad with the good and providing information on time (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). Social media provide a way to

enhance this transparency, as it allows organisations to engage with stakeholders in an open way (Lovejoy et al, 2012). This two-way communication can establish a sense of accountability and transparency in stakeholder relationships (Svensson et al., 2015). Nevertheless, previous studies have found that organisations still struggle with being as transparent as the public expects, especially with regards to reporting the good as well as the bad (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). Moreover, critics point out that this urge for legitimacy and transparency can also lead to organisations, including NGOs, only providing information that is in line with societal expectations (Bellucci, Biagi & Manetti, 2019). Thus, influencing or even manipulating stakeholder perceptions as voluntary information is disclosed for strategic reasons rather than for social responsibility reasons (Patten & Guidry, 2010).

2.4.2. Different engagement strategies

In their study about NGOs and engagement, Algaharabat et al., (2018) used the consumer brand engagement theory, first developed by Linda Hollebeek in 2011. Consumer brand engagement is described as: "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, p.790). In the NGO context, the consumers are the potential supporters and the brand is the NGO. Trying to expand on this theory, Algaharabat et al., (2018) concluded that, with regards to NGOs, the affection dimension is most connected to consumer brand engagement (Algharabat, Rana, Dwivedi, Abdallah Alalwan & Qasem, 2018). They also found that consumer brand engagement is a vital predictor of consumer loyalty, meaning for NGOs it affects the electronic word of mouth and willingness to donate.

Other authors have focused on a different strategies for organisations to use social media for engagement. They claim that the appropriation of social media by organisations is motivated by four strategies (Meijer & Thaens, 2010). Firstly, the push strategy refers to the use of social media by communicating existing content through these channels. In this case there is no interaction between the organisation and the stakeholders, it is used for informational purposes only. Secondly, they claim organisations use social media to attract users to the website and provide them with new information but barely reply to comments, described as the pull strategy. In this case, they define the networking strategy as being one of the most interactive strategies. Social media is used as an interactive tool and engagement is

generated through stakeholder-organisation communication. Lastly, the transaction strategy refers to organisations actually providing public services via social media (Meijer & Thaens, 2010).

Digital engagement has generally been assessed through social media monitoring tools (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga & Bronner, 2018), providing quantitative metrics, such as number of followers, likes, shares, comments, etc. (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Some studies have tried to focus more on other aspects of NGO stakeholder engagement by providing measures that capture more meaningful two-way communication (Ihm, 2015). Nevertheless, most studies focus on likes, shares and comments to understand NGO – stakeholder engagement (Cho, Schweickart, Haase, 2014). Bonsón & Ratkai (2013) set out to analyse the dialogic aspect of Facebook by measuring the popularity (likes), commitment (comments) and virality (shares) of different posts. Further, they looked at stakeholders' mood through content analysis. Other authors have underlined the importance of researching online stakeholder engagement by focusing on other digital traces, such as @USERNAME mentions, hashtags and retweets (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Wang & Yang, 2017). Studies that have focused less on the statistical side of social media engagement argue that engagement is context dependent (Voorveld et al., 2018; Carboni & Maxwell, 2015). Some authors propose that the type of social media used also influences engagement levels, stating that, for example, the platform chosen influences engagement (Voorveld et al., 2018; Armstrong & Butcher, 2017).

Alternative studies regarding the NGOs' context offer a number of factors that could explain stakeholder engagement, ranging from the organisation's reputation, size of online community and number of social networks, to organizational size, expense structure, board size and dependence on volunteers (Alonso-Canadas, Galan-Valdivieso, Saraite-Sariene & Caba-Perez, 2019). These authors conclude that social media provide an excellent tool through which NGOs can bring seemingly distant problems to our day-to-day reality. They suggest that the determinants for the overall success of NGOs rely primarily on their reputation, their size and board size, volunteers and cost structure. However, their findings also show that NGOs should not focus on having multiple platforms, but should instead focus on a few networks and provide content that fosters dialogue, which will result in engagement with stakeholders (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019. According to Xu & Saxton (2019) social capital is at the crux of every stakeholder engagement effort on social media. Social capital plays a particularly important role with regards to NGOs, as they rely on a community and

"goodwill" to exist and reach their goals. Therefore, social capital should first be developed, before NGOs try to establish online engagement. Although social capital is generally not the desired outcome from an investment-returns perspective, it can provide the basis for other valuable outcomes, such as donations, client satisfaction, community trust, new volunteers and potentially adds to the engagement (Xu & Saxton, 2019).

Moreover, past studies have identified two broad domains of message-based engagement tactics, one based on "what they say" (Saxton & Guo, 2015) and one on "who they target" (Saxton & Guo, 2015). The first tactic is content-based (Xu & Saxton, 2019), which occurs when organizations focus on their content by carefully crafting out what to say and when to say it, to create engagement. Related to this is the importance of type of the post which can influence the level of engagement. Existing literature has found audiences respond better to more frequent messages that include different forms of visual, textual and vocal cues, for example links to articles, videos or images (Lovejoy et al, 2012; Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019). Moreover, authors suggest emotional posts work better in terms of virality and can therefore potentially reach and engage with more people online (Nikolinakou & King, 2018). In addition, adding hashtags could provide a way to join conversations with like-minded users, open up conversation and potentially contributes to the image of the organisation as an active participant (Xu & Saxton; 2019). Multimedia content increases an organizations' social presence as well as level of transparency resulting in a higher degree of trust and ultimately engagement. The second tactic, coined as connection-building (Saxton & Guo, 2015), refers to when organizations focus on who they want to target with their communication. This could be done by for example using users' @USERNAME in a message to directly converse with them. This, in turn, enhances engagement because the organization becomes more trustworthy as it acknowledges the online presence of the person in question.

Despite the enthusiasm for engagement possibilities for NGOs, most studies suggest that they are failing to truly engage with their stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009; Bortree & Seltzer; 2009). Researchers agree that NGOs are losing out by underutilizing the dialogic aspect of social media as they are using social media solely for one-way communication (Greenberg & MacAuley, 2009; Waters et al., 2009) and do not create deeper engagement with supporters (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Raja-Yusof et al., 2016).

Online stakeholder engagement could potentially be one of the most fruitful aspects of social media for NGOs. In the last several years NGOs have been trying to engage more on

social media, especially on Twitter and Facebook. However, most research concludes that with regards to engagement, NGOs are not using their social media to its full potential.

From this literature review, it becomes clear that social media offer great potential for NGOs. However, the literature does not cover all aspects equally and there is a lack of knowledge about how NGOs are using Instagram. In addition, literature providing in-depth knowledge about how NGOs use social media, focusing on the content of their platforms is scarce. Moreover, research about NGOs in Africa and the topic of (anti-)poaching NGOs is underrepresented. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate this topic further.

Guided by these motivations, this thesis will explore how NGOs use social media in their battle against poaching by investigating in what ways NGOs communicate about this topic on Facebook and Instagram, what content is most salient and lastly, will investigate how NGOs invite engagement and what posts elicit more engagement.

Chapter 3: Research design and rationale

This chapter introduces the methodology selected to research how NGOs use social media in their battle against poaching. The first section discusses why qualitative methodology was chosen as the research method, as well as why Africa was chosen as the research context. Next, the sampling criteria and procedure will be discussed, including the inclusion criteria and means of measurement. Lastly, the method of data analysis, namely thematic content analysis, will be explained.

3.1. Methodology

Since the objective of this research is to find out how NGOs use social media, a qualitative research design was chosen. The analysis of qualitative data can be referred to as "the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (Flick, 2018, p. 5). Qualitative methods aim to describe a phenomenon and come to generalisable statements by comparing different texts or cases (Flick, 2013). It focuses on describing the making of a social situation, by gathering data about it, analysing it and then drawing conclusions from it. Therefore, qualitative methods fit this research best, as it aims to find out how NGOs communicate about (anti-)poaching, what content is most salient on their platforms and how they engage with stakeholders about this topic. This research is exploratory in nature, as not much has been written about NGOs' social media utilization in Africa, online stakeholder engagement in this region and social media in the (anti-)poaching context (Nchabeleng et al., 2018).

This research examines NGOs' digital footprint related to the research questions, therefore the specific method used is content analysis. Qualitative content analysis allowed the researcher to interpret large amounts of data by systematically organizing, integrating and examining the data during which the researcher looked for patterns and relationships (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Schreier, 2013). This technique is often used for textual data (or messages) as it makes interpretations of textual material replicable (Lawrence Neuman, 2014). Therefore, this method was used to analyse social media platforms and messages about (anti-)poaching, as well as to determine how NGOs' invited engagement from (potential) stakeholders.

In this thesis NGOs in Africa were of specific interest, as this region has been particularly affected by poaching. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it is an understudied

region with regards to the topic of NGOs' use of social media, as well as studies about social media and (anti-)poaching. In addition, the researcher has a personal interest in this region and the (anti-)poaching aspect, as African wildlife and conservation have been of importance throughout her life. These reasons rendered it most interesting to use this geographical area as the research context.

3.2. Sampling criteria & Procedure

The content analysed for this study came from social media platforms of different NGOs who focus on (anti-)poaching in Africa. The NGOs were chosen to fit the parameters of this project, by first analysing which NGOs focus most on (anti-)poaching and what social media platforms they used. Then it was decided to choose six NGOs (*N*=6), ranging from larger NGOs to smaller NGOs focusing on this cause. The size was determined by the amount of likes on their Facebook pages. The specific selection was done to create a more representative sample, as it focuses on different sizes NGOs. In addition, it represents a sample of more internationally known NGOs and local ones, giving the researcher the opportunity to analyse potential differences between the larger and smaller NGOs with regards to social media use. The larger NGOs are: Save the Rhino International (241.685 likes), the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (37.508 likes) and The WILD Foundation (25.497 likes). These NGOs were categorised as large because they focus on specific (anti-)poaching efforts, but are still international in nature as most are based in the USA or the UK. The smaller NGOs were selected as they focus on a specific region or animal and are less internationally known. The small NGOs are: Chengeta Wildlife (5.489 likes), Wilderness Foundation Africa (4.993 likes) and Chipembere Rhino Foundation (4.802 likes). The information about the NGOs number of likes was retrieved from their Facebook pages on the 26th of April 2019.

Figure 1. Total number of likes and followers per NGO
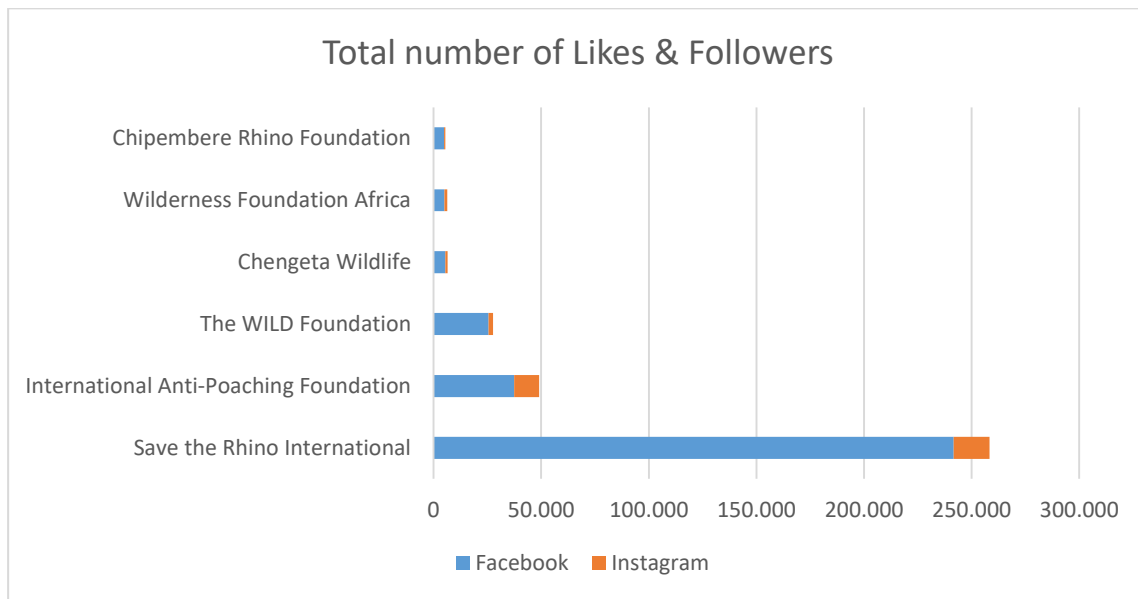
Furthermore, this research is limited to two social media platforms. Firstly, Facebook, the most popular social media platform used by NGOs and secondly Instagram, a relatively new platform used by NGOs (Mangles, 2017). These platforms provided enough content and examples as all NGOs posted content about (anti-)poaching. It was interesting to analyse these platforms as it not only provided new insights into anti-poaching efforts on Facebook, but also on Instagram, a platform which has been understudied until now with regards to NGOs social media use. According to the ESHCC *Methodological Guidelines Thesis Research* (2018)*,* about 500-1000 Facebook posts and/or 150-180 visually based medium posts on, for example, Instagram should be analysed. In line with these guidelines, a sufficient number of posts were analysed (*N*= 1.007) during this research. In total 653 posts were analysed for Facebook and 354 were analysed for Instagram. The content was taken from the social media platforms if the post related to anything to do with poaching.

This study was based on social media posts from January 2018 until December 2018. This research period was chosen as it provided most recent information possible and was thus most relevant for studying the usage of social media. Also, the number of social media users has risen significantly over the past years (Kemp, 2018) and has become particularly popular for organisations, including NGOs (Xu & Saxton, 2019).

The selection criteria therefore mount to posts from six NGOs who have Facebook and/or Instagram and focus on poaching and anti-poaching in Africa and were posted between January and December 2018.

3.3. Operationalization & Research Instrument

The first research question (In what ways do NGOs communicate about (anti-) poaching in Africa on Facebook and Instagram?) was examined by analysing the different social media posts and adding them to the coding document. In this document, the researcher selected the different topics which were applicable to the first research question. Focusing on, for example, if the post was informative, activating, asserted effectiveness, focused community building, or was trying to elicit emotion.

The second research question (What content is most salient on anti-poaching NGOs' social media platforms?) was assessed by investigating what content was most salient on the NGOs Facebook and Instagram platforms. The researcher analysed the posts and added several content specific codes to the specific post. These codes included the type of NGO (smaller or larger), the country (if mentioned), who were the actors in the post and what animal the post was about. Moreover, codes were also assigned to whether the post had a visual and what type of visual it was.

The third research question (How do NGOs invite engagement on their platforms about this issue and what posts elicit more engagement?) was assessed by looking at ways in which NGOs were inviting engagement on their platforms. In addition, what posts elicited more engagement was analysed using the number of likes, comments, views and shares (on Facebook).

3.4. Data Analysis

The units of analysis in this qualitative data analysis consisted of the social media posts taken from the different NGOs' platforms. The content was specifically analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis provided numerous opportunities for this research, as it is perceived as a flexible method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this case, an inductive approach was also chosen since existing research on NGOs' social media use in Africa, online stakeholder engagement and (anti-)poaching are subjects that have received little attention in previous literature (Nchabeleng et al., 2018; Armstrong & Butcher, 2017). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), clear guidelines related to conducting thematic analysis are absent. Therefore this thesis has conducted research based on the grounded theory

approach. This approach allowed the researcher to develop theory from the data, instead of trying to verify hypotheses, which is more common in quantitative studies (Cho & Lee, 2014). Thus, this thematic analysis was data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process did not build on pre-existing coding frames. However, it should be noted that the researcher was inspired by previous literature focusing on how NGOs use social media and how engagement was measured in these studies.

During this research the raw data were organized into conceptual categories. After analysing the data it was coded and from this, conclusions were drawn. According to Boeije (2010), credible research can only be conducted by following three coding steps: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. This method was followed while doing the research for this thesis.

Before the open coding process was started, an initial list of codes was developed from the coding document. This helped the researcher to identify the first set of actual codes, during which new codes emerged through the open coding process (Boeije, 2010). Even though this might be perceived as a more deductive way of doing research, the data-driven or inductive approach is still applicable because open coding was still the main method used. Thus, during this process the data was divided into different segments. These segments then received a code and were compared with each other. This whole process is called open coding.

The next step is referred to as axial coding. The primary purpose of axial coding was to determine which elements were dominant in the research. It started with the reassembling process mentioned above. After analysing similarities and differences between these segments, main codes and sub-codes were developed. Ultimately, the main themes and categories came to the surface.

The next step required the researcher to reflect on the relationship between the dominant themes and identify key concepts or dominant discourses. This process is called selective coding. In this step, the five core communication categories were defined and analysed and the main message was ultimately retrieved.

As mentioned above, this method does not have concise guidelines. Therefore, the reliability and validity of this method should be addressed. Reliability refers to the durability and strength of methods. Here, both internal and external reliability are of importance. Internal validity refers to the accuracy of the results, whereas the external validity relates to the generalizability of the findings. For qualitative research, reliability occurs when the

method used is complete and accurate. In addition, this research should be able to be conducted using the same steps and coming to the same conclusion by other researchers in the future (Silverman, 2011). Therefore, it is important to explain how the research was done exactly so other researchers can potentially repeat the study and come to the same conclusions and if the findings can potentially be applied to a larger dataset, or are only valid for a smaller dataset.

Chapter 4: Results

This thesis examines how NGOs use social media in their battle against poaching by focusing on in what ways NGOs communicate about this issue on their platforms, on what content is most salient on these platforms and, finally, on how NGOs invite engagement and what type of posts elicit more engagement. This chapter discusses the results of the qualitative content analysis, supplemented by quantitative analysis, of NGO Facebook and Instagram platforms.

The results indicate that although these NGOs focus on a similar cause, the content posted differs per organization. Some NGOs focus more on specific animals, whereas others focus more on the organisation itself and the rangers who are trying to keep the animals safe. In addition, there were differences between the content on Facebook and the content on Instagram, indicating that NGOs use these platforms differently.

The findings also suggest that NGOs focusing on (anti-)poaching in Africa use different ways to communicate about this issue. Although informing followers turned out to be the most important strategy, other strategies, such as activating and community building, were also detected. Moreover, noteworthy differences were found between the ways in which NGOs use Facebook and Instagram to communicate their message.

Moreover, the results illuminate that certain content is more salient on anti-poaching NGOs platforms. Visuals are an important element in the way anti-poaching NGOs communicate on their platforms. Also, they use different digital opportunities and features provided by their platforms, such as the donate feature on Facebook and hashtags.

Finally, the analysis showed that certain categories of posts elicit more engagement than others. But it also showed that there are differences between what posts elicit more engagement on Facebook and Instagram.

Of the sample of 1.007 posts, 64.8% are Facebook posts and 35.1% are Instagram posts. This shows that, although all posts were posted in 2018, Facebook still has most content. This is probably attributable to the fact that Facebook has been around for longer (since 2004), and has therefore become a more common and better established social media platform for organisations to use. Moreover, it continues to be the most used social medium in the world (Kemp, 2019). So in terms of reach, Facebook still offers more favourable circumstances. However, over the last few years Instagram has become increasingly popular and with 802.3 million users worldwide has become the third most used social network (Kemp, 2019). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Facebook bought Instagram in 2012 (Facebook

buys Instagram, 2012) and although they are still perceived as two separate platforms, they are becoming more and more connected and intertwined. So when focusing on the back-end of social media (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2017), it is important to take into account that this large corporate, Facebook, controls both these platforms (Poell & van Dijck, 2015).

Figure 2. Total number of posts per NGO
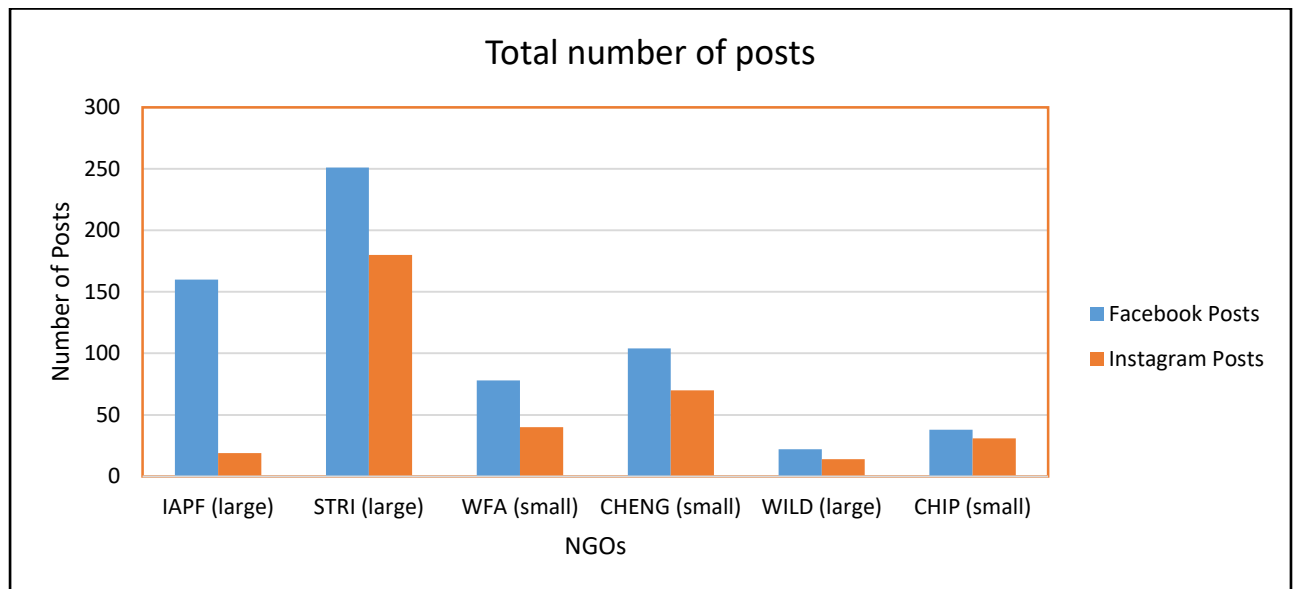
The results show that the NGOs examined use both Facebook and Instagram and generally post the same content (an estimate of 70% overlap) on both platforms. However, on average they post less content on Instagram. The findings suggest that in terms of Facebook versus Instagram usage, the NGOs do differ. Although most NGOs post content on both their Facebook and Instagram platforms, one NGO deviates from the others by posting significantly more on Facebook than on Instagram. The International Anti-Poaching Foundation posted 160 posts on Facebook and only 19 on Instagram. This could potentially relate to their social media strategy, where they have chosen to focus on one social media platform instead of multiple platforms, to ensure they post enough and interesting content for their followers (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019). Overall, the results show that, although there is a global rise in Instagram usage, over a period of one year NGOs still post less content on Instagram than on Facebook.

Not surprisingly, the NGOs focussing on more general wildlife issues, in this case Wilderness Foundation Africa and The WILD Foundation, post less content about anti-poaching than the NGOs focussing solely on (anti-)poaching. Save the Rhino International

and The International Anti-Poaching Foundation, the two larger NGOs in terms of social media platform likes, post more content than the smaller NGOs. This correlates with literature suggesting that, although smaller NGOs could especially benefit from social media, they are generally more limited in resources (Hemphill et al., 2018). However, both the smaller NGOs, Chengeta Wildlife Foundation and Chipembere Rhino Foundation do post significantly more on Instagram than one of the larger NGOs, suggesting that size does not necessarily influence the content quantity.

Most posts do not cover a specific country. However, overall the country that is covered most is South Africa. Other African countries that are mentioned are Zimbabwe, Mali and Kenya. Interestingly, the United Kingdom is also mentioned quite often in different posts, probably related to the fact that one of the NGOs is based in the UK and they are trying to reach potential donors and supporters in this region. Further, some Asian countries are also mentioned as this region influences poaching numbers by keeping up their demand for, for example, rhino horn. Of the Asian countries, Vietnam and China are mentioned most, as they are most involved in the illegal wildlife trade (Master, 2019).

The posts also make it possible to identify different actors related to the cause. These actors range from governments and the public, to rangers and animals. Animals were analysed as actors because they were given agency in the different posts that were analysed. A notable example of this agency is attributable to the death of the last northern white rhino. This rhino was called Sudan, and several posts actually refer to him as Sudan. The Wilderness Foundation Africa posted: "Rest in Peace, Sudan" (Facebook, 2018) and Save the Rhino International said: "Devastating news this morning. Sudan, the last male northern white rhino has died in Kenya…" (Instagram, 2018). Another example showed a picture of a baby rhino with its mother and stated: "Oh hey there Granville. Isn't he just adorable - @westmidsafari's latest rhino arrival!" (Facebook, 2018). These examples illustrate that animals are given a certain agency in posts, and were therefore analysed as actors.

Figure 3 & 4. Different actors on Facebook and Instagram
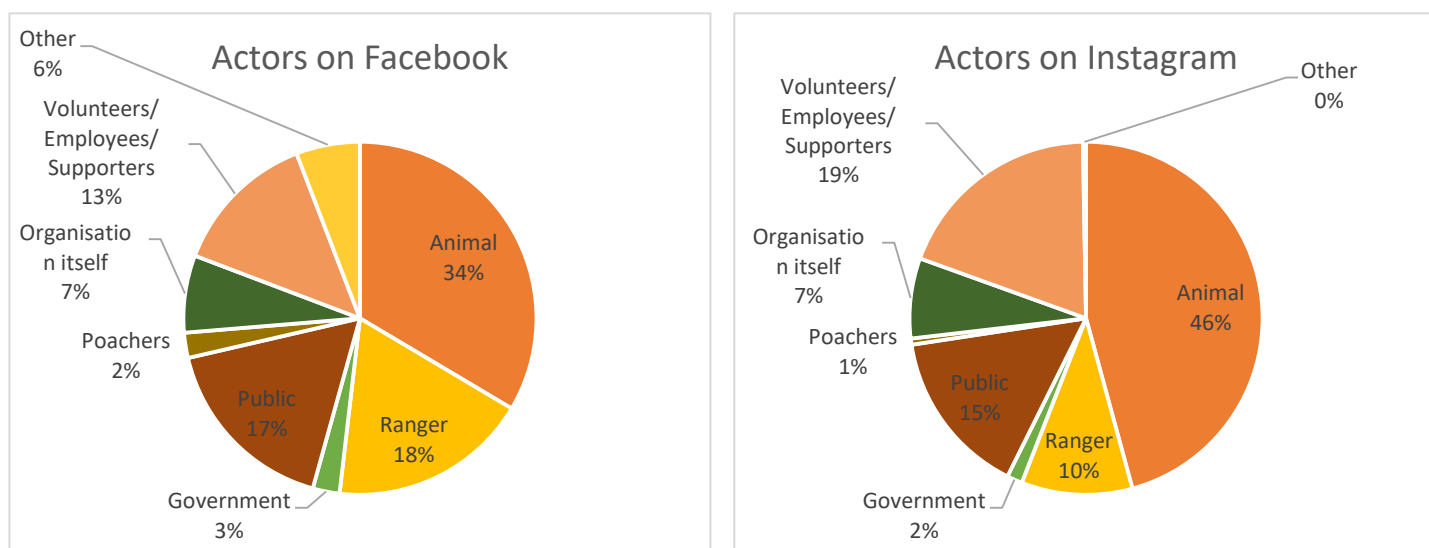
Not surprisingly animals are the most prominent actors on both Facebook and Instagram. However, there is a difference in the second most prominent actor. For Facebook this actor are the rangers who are trying to protect the animals, but for Instagram volunteers, employees and supporters come in second place. On both Facebook (47.8%) and Instagram (66.4%) the most featured animal is the rhino. On Instagram this is followed by posts with elephants as the main animal. On Facebook, no specific animal comes second. This could relate to the fact that the NGOs discuss more about rangers on Facebook, and therefore the posts do not specifically focus on an animal. Another interesting finding is that not only wild African animals are discussed. An important animal that is often highlighted is the dog or to be specific, the sniffer/tracking dogs that help rangers track down poachers. The NGOs feels this actor deserves special attention and could potentially help in raising funds and awareness, as most posts about these tracking dogs relate to either appealing for donations or raising awareness about the poaching issue.

Related to the actors are the type of messages they feature in. Most posts about rangers highlight the importance of rangers, being an essential line of defence in the NGOs battle against poaching. Some NGOs show their appreciation towards the rangers by posting, for example: "Chipembere Rhino Foundation salutes rangers this World Ranger Day for their hard work, passion and dedication. Thank You Rangers!" (Chipembere Rhino Foundation Facebook, 2018). Lastly, as in some areas the poaching battle has turned into a full blown war between the rangers and the paramilitary poaching syndicates and rangers are being killed in the line of duty, some NGOs also use their platforms to pay tribute to their fallen

rangers. The NGOs generally dedicate a 'rest in peace' post to them and show their remorse to the ranger's family, such as: "Devastating news from the ground in Mali. Abdramane Fradji who was a ranger for the Malian Forestry department (Eaux et Forets) has fallen in the line of duty…" (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Instagram, 2018).

Figure 5. Rest in Peace Post. (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Instagram, 2018).

Another interesting pattern found, are the posts that focus on darker and more serious issues. For example, certain posts discuss and criticize the corruption and lack of proper legislation in African and Asian counties. Other NGOs use their social media platforms to get people to join demonstrations against certain laws (See Figure 6: Asking followers to join events). This is interesting as it relates to a potential challenge that comes with social media. By posting these types of messages, the NGO is at risk of leaving behind a controversial digital footprint that could be traced by the government and potentially used against them in future conflicts (Armstrong & Butcher, 2017).

4.1. NGOs communication strategies

Besides the general content found after analysing the different posts, five overarching communication strategies were found via thematic content analysis. These five strategies

were categorized as: information, activating, asserting effectiveness, community building and eliciting emotion, and present the ways in which NGOs communicate on their social media platforms. The table below shows an overview of how many posts were found per category and what the percentage is of that category on both Facebook and Instagram. Furthermore, it provides the sub-categories that were found during the analysis and were ascribed to the overarching categories. Moreover, it shows which types of posts were attributed to the different (sub-)categories by providing illustrative examples of social media posts posted by the NGOs relating to (anti-)poaching.

Figure 6. Categories social media posts NGOs

Category	Example post	NGO	Platform	Freq.	(%)
1. Information			Facebook	**369**	**56.5**
			Instagram	**195**	**55.1**
Providing general information	Anti-poaching units are working harder than ever to protect rhinos against an onslaught of poaching in South Africa. Getting the correct tactical gear to the people on the frontline, and making sure they have comfortable accommodation to come home to and warm clothing for long evenings, improves team morale and increases effectiveness of the units.	Save the Rhino International			
Creating awareness about the issue	We recently celebrated World Lion Day on 10 August and World Elephant Day on 12 August. The sad reality is that lions have disappeared from 90% of their historic range and are now extinct in 26 African countries and more than 25 000 elephants are killed for their ivory every year in Africa. Let's keep the conservation alive. #conservation #ForeverWildLion #ForeverWildElephant #nature	Wilderness Foundation Africa			
2. Activating			Facebook	**123**	**18.8**
			Instagram	**54**	**15.3**
Appeals for donations or support	Rhino X Box appeal 1: We have been approached by a local Eastern Cape Reserve who have recently been affected by rhino poaching and they are looking for assistance for rhino monitoring	Chipembere Rhino Foundation			

	equipment. We have pledged our help – can you help us help play our part, where it counts, on the ground? Our target for this RHINO X BOX is raising the much needed 15,000ZAR to help this reserve. Donate TODAY and quote X + your name or company name as the reference. #ChipembereRhinoFoundation #SavingRhinosOnAtATime #UnitedAgainstPoaching	
Appeals for donations via Facebook "Donate" feature	Be a part of the historic effort to keep Earth wild. This #GivingTuesday, give to the WILD Foundation and be a part of 40 years old conservation commitment that persists to this day so that nature will prevail!	The WILD Foundation
Soliciting dialogue through questions or statements	"People made fun of me because I was fat. I was shocked when I was chosen to be a ranger. I didn't think I could make it because of my body." Bella is one of our female rangers. She's great with a rifle and wants to go back to school. It's tough being a ranger, but the other women help her to stay positive. Will you share a message of support?	The International Anti-Poaching Foundation
Asking followers to buy something	Enjoy your morning drink with a Save the Rhino mug! Exclusive to our ambassador members, stojo mugs are the perfect winter warming accessory!	Save the Rhino International
Asking followers to join events	Can YOU be there? Join us on Monday, 26th of November at 07:30 am at the Drosty Arch in front of Rhodes University where we will be joining a unified intent from the Eastern Cape government, Provincial departments, rhino custodians and members of the public who are determined to end this countries poaching scrourge, starting with the EC. #notinourprovince #notinourafrica #unitedwestand #stoprhinopoaching #chipembererhinofoundation #justiceforourrhino #betheirvoice	Chipembere Rhino Foundation

3. Asserting effectiveness			Facebook	**43**	**6.6**
			Instagram	**24**	**6.8**
Celebrating success for the general cause	WONDERFUL NEWS: During the year of 2017, not a single #elephants in #Mali was killed by poachers! The power of collaboration and very hard world of our partners, Chengeta Wildlife, International Conservation Fund of Canada, Yachak and United Nations Environment Programme is paying off. Let's keep these successes going! #WorthMoreAlive	The WILD Foundation			
Reporting on success of NGO	ARREST UPDATE! Your Akashinga team of anti-poaching rangers did it again. This time, in conjunction with the police, our Brave Ones apprehended 4 bush-meat poachers in raids across three villages. Altogether 22.71 pounds (10.30kg) of semi-dry bush meat was recovered…	The International Anti-Poaching Foundation			
4. Community building			Facebook	**92**	**14.1**
			Instagram	**48**	**13.6**
Involving the local community	Engaging local people in rhino conservation is really important to improve protection of these animals. Assam's latest project to get younger people motivated to save rhinos is a step in the right direction.	Save the Rhino International			
Addressing partnerships	We are so excites to announce that Chengeta Wildlife, has signed a partnership agreement with WWF Central African Republic to provide training, mentoring and other assistance to rangers in Czanga-Sangha in the South West of the country	Chengeta Wildlife Foundation			
Recruiting employees/volunteers	Join the Save the Rhino International team as a Fundraising Officer. This exciting role offers the	Save the Rhino International			

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	chance to work for an international conservation charity, providing an excellent opportunity to gain experience in fundraising and conservation sectors. You will join a friendly, highly motivated and impact-driven team, and will gain experience in a variety of fundraising areas. A permanent role offering 21,00-22,000 pounds (Depending on experience)…	
Acknowledging employees/team	Monday's meet the team. Today we feature, co-founder and anti-poaching expert, Rory Young! ---- Pro Guide, Ranger, Anti-Poaching Strategist/Trainer, Author, Young is an expert tracker with amazing knowledge, skills and highly developed intuition to become one of the best in his field. Young has dedicated this life to wildlife protection. Young co-authored, A Field Manual For Anti-Poaching Activities, a guide that provide workable solution to poaching. ----	Chengeta Wildlife Foundation
Thanking partners	What a privilege to be part of this amazing initiative! Thank you Rhino Run for choosing Chipembere as a beneficiary! #rhinorun #chipembere	Chipembere Rhino Foundation
Thanking supporters	Thank you to Dan Richardson and Margot Raggett for the role you play in creating awareness for the plight of the rhino.	Wilderness Foundation Africa

|				
5. Eliciting emotion			Facebook	**26**	**4.0**
			Instagram	**33**	**9.3**
Entertaining posts (humor/cuteness)	Video of a baby rhino discovering his mum's horn! So adorable.	Save the Rhino International		
Shocking posts (shocking photos or stories)	Heart breaking news as a young Black Rhino was poached on Thusday afternoon at Great Fish Nature Reserve. This is the third rhino to be	Chipembere Rhino Foundation		

killed in the Eastern Cape this month! #rhino #stoprhinopoaching #heartbroken #sadnews #blackrhino #stoppoaching			
Total	**Facebook**	**653**	**100**
Total	**Instagram**	**354**	**100**

4.1.1. NGOs inform, activate and build communities

Figure 7. Communication strategies NGOs.
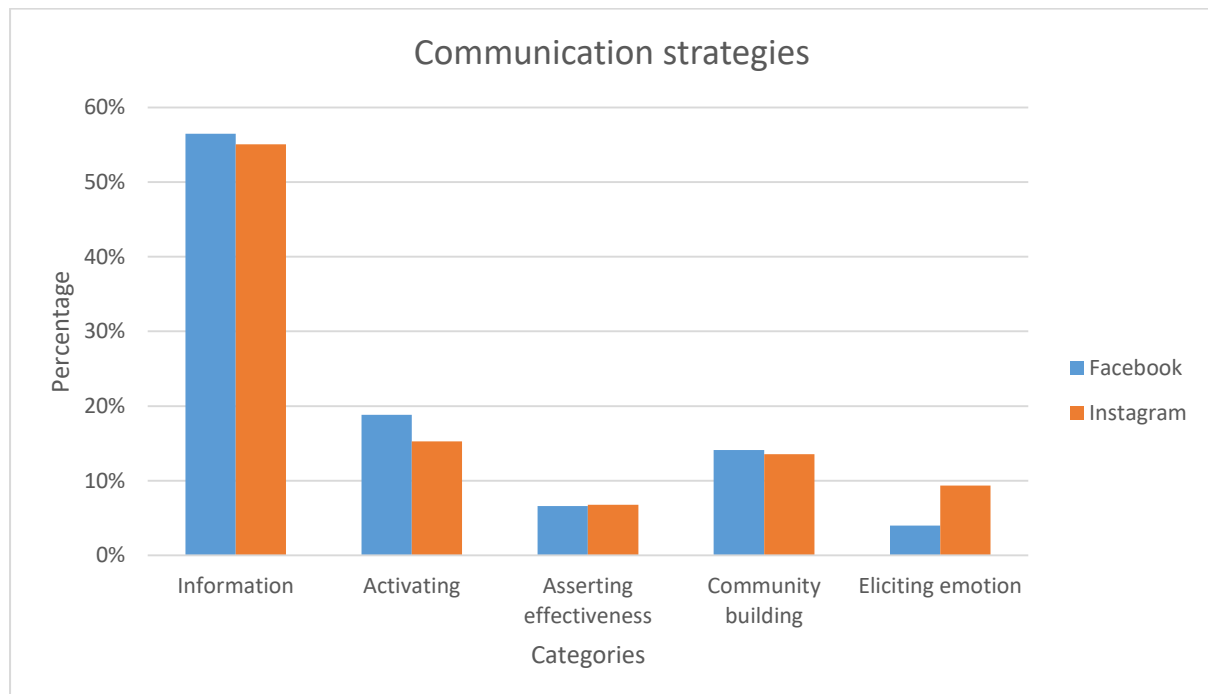
Consistent with prior research (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Armstrong & Butcher, 2017) most NGOs rely on information dissemination as the primary strategy on both Facebook and Instagram. For both platforms more than half of the posts are related to the category information (Facebook: 56.6%, Instagram: 55.1%) which consists of posts relating to providing information about the organization or cause and creating awareness. An example of a post that was attributed to information is:

"The story of Chengeta, and how we started… The organization was established to directly support anti-poaching effort on the ground in Africa, as a result of a wave of support for

wildlife expert and professional guide, Rory Young. Read more:
http://chenegtawildlife.org/about-us/#about-us." (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Instagram,
2018).

This posts illustrates how NGOs inform their online audience by telling their unique story.
The posts that were attributed to creating awareness generally provided information about,
for example, the high poaching statistics or the fact that poaching is still a major issue for
African countries (See Table 6: Information). One interesting post by The International Anti-
Poaching Foundation, related to information gave new insights into the online ivory trade by
quoting the executive director of the Center on Illicit Networks and Transnational Organized
Crime: "I have looked at thousands of posts containing ivory, and I am convinced that
Facebook is literally facilitating the extinction of the elephant species (Facebook, 2018)". It
also included an article about this topic. This specific post is noteworthy as it focuses on the
virtual communities discussed by several authors (Svensson et al, 2015; Lovejoy & Saxton,
2012) as being one of the beneficial affordances provided by social media for NGOs.
However, in this case these online communities actually benefit the poacher and ivory traders
and contest NGOs efforts to stop poaching.

Another notable post addresses their followers in an interesting way as it highlights
the harsh reality of anti-poaching efforts:

"A quick note to say that we hope you're not getting tired of hearing about all of the great
work our rangers are doing, and the arrests we're making with your support. If you want
glossy photos of ineffective posers, you'll definitely need to go elsewhere. But if you like
grit, reality and results – with a generous scoop of hope (and a dash of laughter) mixes in…
well, you've found your pace. Stay tuned, friend and allies: We're in this for the long haul,
and we're just getting started! ☺" (The International Anti-Poaching Foundation Facebook,
2018).

This post stood out because it points to the fact that the NGO disseminates realistic
information and tries to create transparency by addressing their online followers in this way.
It is a clear message from the NGO that they are working on a serious cause which deserves
serious attention and support, even though they are communicating on a social media
platform. Moreover, the information posts relate to what Meijer & Thaens (2010) refer to as

the push and pull strategies. NGOs are communicating existing knowledge, but also providing their users with new information.

Nevertheless, NGOs do not solely use their social media for informative purposes. They also use other ways of communicating. Interestingly, the second most prominent strategy is the 'activating' category (Facebook: 18.8%, Instagram: 15.3%) which manifests in different ways. Some posts try to activate followers online, by soliciting dialogue through questions or statements or by appealing for online donations and online purchases, while others ask direct questions about poaching or post statements about the ongoing issue and try to provoke followers to answers by asking their opinions on the matter (See Table 6: Activating). Save the Rhino International tries to elicit dialogue by asking their followers innocent questions, such as "What is your favourite animal?" or tries to activate followers to answer knowledge questions like "Name the species. Go go go!".

Figure 8. Name the species (Save the Rhino International Instagram, 2018).
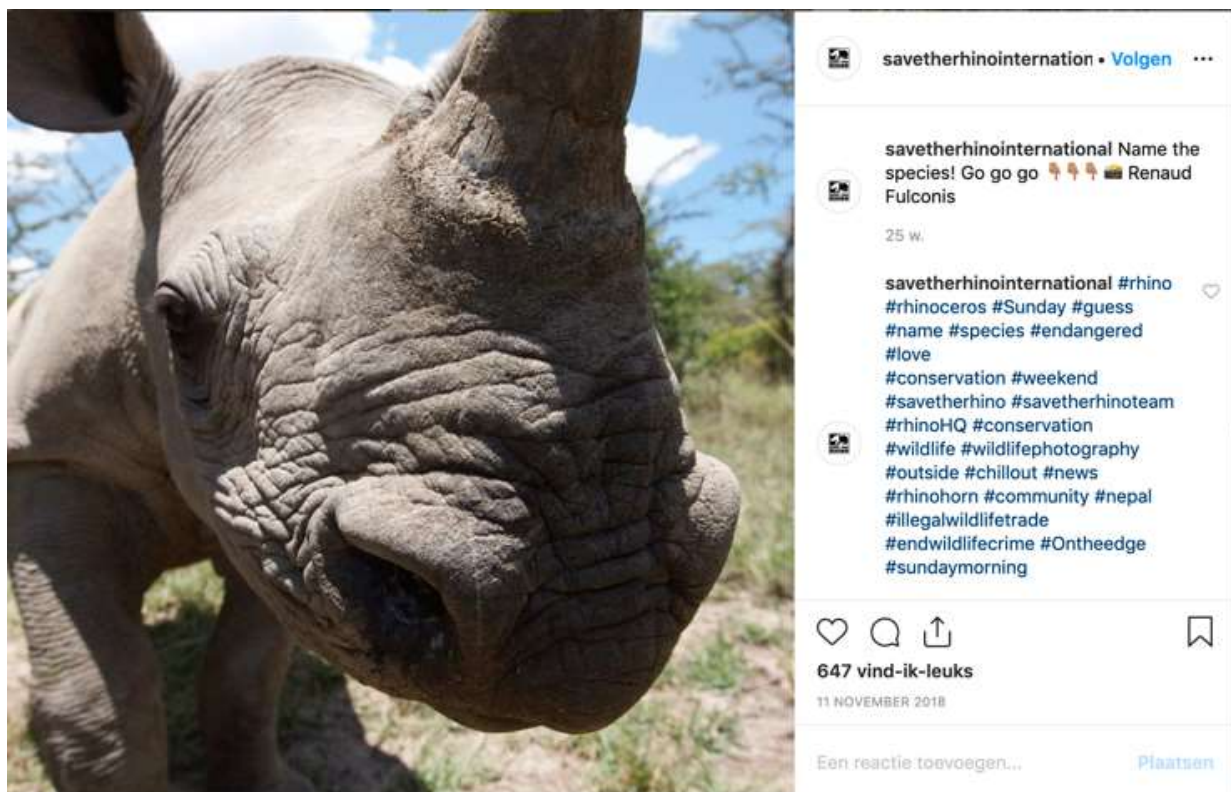
Another way in which NGOs try to activate followers is by asking them to write a positive review about the organisation or by asking them to share their page with their friends online to get more likes and reach. Furthermore, some NGOs truly try to get their followers

involved, by asking them to leave a kind message for the rangers in the comment section to show their support. Others urge followers to come up with questions for the rangers or the organisation: "We all want to know what it's like to be on the front line of Anti-Poaching! Ask our rangers a questions and we will get them to answer it for you!", and actually answer the questions accordingly: "Leave your comments in the comments and stay tuned for the answers. #ChengetaWildlife" (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Facebook, 2018).

Moreover, NGOs try to activate their online followers by inviting them to events, ranging from music festivals to marathons. In doing so, NGOs use their online platforms to activate people to join their offline events.

The third most used communication strategy is 'community building' (Facebook: 14.1%, Instagram: 13.6%). This shows that certain affordances of social media, such as being able to reach a large following and create an online community, are in fact being teased out by NGOs (Seo et al., 2009). Some NGOs post about how they are involving the local community in anti-poaching efforts on the ground and education, or about how local initiatives are raising funds for their cause (See Table 6: Community building). In addition, NGOs also focus on community in the sense of partnerships. These posts announce new partnerships or focus on existing ones. Moreover, this category of posts also include the community of the organization itself. Some NGOs use their platforms to show the faces behind the organisation and, in this way, try to create the feeling of a true community by introducing their team and volunteers. Chengeta Wildlife Foundation even introduced a "Monday's Meet the Team" post which featured a new employee every week. Further, NGOs also use their platforms to actively recruit new employees and volunteers by posting open vacancies on their social media and asking followers to spread the word, leveraging the electronic word of mouth aspect of social media. Save the Rhino International even focuses specifically on recruiting new interns via their platforms. This seems to be a clever way of reaching a young audience who might be interested in an internship, as the younger generation tends to be more active on social media (Kemp, 2019).

Figure 9. Recruiting new interns. (Save the Rhino International Instagram, 2018).

Lastly, an important element related to community building is giving thanks to the NGOs' followers. Thanking stakeholders consisted of thanking both partners and supporters and is forthcoming in the sample of posts (See Table 6: Thanking partners and supporters). Apparently, NGOs are using the large reach and relative ease of social media to give thanks and show appreciating to their supporters.

4.1.2. Other communication strategies

Despite the fact that the first three most notable categories were the same for Facebook and Instagram, the least prominent one differs between the two platforms. For Facebook 'eliciting emotion' (4%) turned out to be least distinguished. Although eliciting emotion was one of the least used strategies, the results show it is still present in the sample and therefore a notable communication strategy for anti-poaching NGOs. The category eliciting emotion consisted of posts that tried to evoke some sort of emotion from the followers (See Table 6: Eliciting emotion). These posts either entailed humorous and cute content, such as funny stories or pictures of baby animals. Or consisted of shocking content, such as the growing poaching statistics or gruesome poaching stories.

For Instagram the category 'asserting effectiveness' (6.8%) was least present. Posts that were attributed to this category related to the effectiveness of anti-poaching NGOs efforts, so either celebrated success in anti-poaching efforts in general or highlighted the specific success or impact of the NGO (See Table 6: Asserting effectiveness). For example, The International Anti-Poaching Foundation posts several messages about the success of one of their (all female) anti-poaching unit Akashinga. Some NGOs posts about what has actually been done with the donations and report this back to their followers. This openness contributes to the NGOs transparency and allows for more trust from the online audience (Lovejoy et al, 2012). Other posts related to global success highlighted, for example, new legislation in Cambodia or Vietnam banning ivory or rhino horn.

The fact that the least used communication strategy differed between Facebook and Instagram shows that although NGOs are using both platforms for the same cause, not all ways in which they communicate about the issue are the same. Facebook is used less to elicit emotion and more to communicate about the effectiveness of the organization's efforts and the successes for the cause in general, whereas Instagram is used more to elicit emotion by using shocking, humorous and cute content than to discuss the actual impact. An explanation for this difference could be related to the fact that the two platforms offer different opportunities and were developed in different ways. Facebook started off as an online platform to find friends and communicate with them via textual posts. Discussing the effectiveness of anti-poaching efforts is generally more serious in nature and therefore suits Facebook better than Instagram. However, Instagram was developed as a social medium where photos were more prominent than text. A plausible explanation could be that posting shocking and cute photos or videos is more relatable to Instagram than Facebook, because this platform is more visually focused (Kemp, 2019). Moreover, Instagram is generally used as a more 'fun' medium and therefore humour is generally used a lot on this social medium.

In summary, NGOs use different ways to communicate on their Facebook and Instagram. Some communication strategies are used more frequently than others, with information, activating and community building being the most prominent ones. Eliciting emotion and asserting effectiveness were less salient, but still relevant to NGOs as these categories are prevalent throughout the research.

4.2. NGOs most salient content

The findings illuminate that the anti-poaching NGOs use specific content to disseminate their messages online. This section discusses which aspects of NGOs communication on their platforms are most salient and therefore most notable.

All posts analysed included text. However, some NGOs posted longer texts than others. Interestingly, the smaller NGOs, Chengeta Wildlife Foundation and Chipembere Rhino Foundation, posted longer texts than the other NGOs on both Facebook and Instagram. They generally wrote a whole story. An example of a relatively long story by Chengeta Wildlife Foundation goes as follows:

"We welcome Franck Cuinnet and Yiann Galeran to Chengeta and look forward to what has already started as a highly successful and interesting 2018. They are both highly trained individuals in a variety of skills and bring a wealth of experience into the team with them --- 2018 is fast becoming an exciting year for us as Chengeta and our successful doctrine for training officers in wildlife protection. We had a hard year of preparation in 2016 and the Mali training operation was an unprecedented success in 2017 and continues to be so as we move into 2018 despite the escalating conflict and humanitarian crisis. However, we …(Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Instagram, 2018)"

This post continues even further by informing their followers of their accomplishments in 2018 and provides information about Chengeta as organisation. In addition, as most NGOs are based in an English speaking country, not surprisingly, most posts analysed were written in English. However, one NGO also posts some content in a different language, namely Vietnamese. Some of The Wilderness Foundation Africa's posts were in Vietnamese, providing an English translation in the same post and one post was completely in Vietnamese. This sudden change in language probably relates to a project of the NGO in Vietnam and tries to strengthen the collaboration between the NGO and the Vietnamese organisation. The NGO is trying to reach out to the Vietnamese community by posting in the local language. For the project, the NGO actually came up with a way to engage with their audience by asking their followers to take pictures with the 'Rhino Ranger Frame' and then

posting this on their own social media and using the hashtag #vietnambemyhero. This post also included a message in Vietnamese.

Figure 10. Rhino Ranger Frame. (Wilderness Foundation Africa Facebook, 2018).

Furthermore, Chengeta Wildlife Foundation also highlights their global community by posting: "Did you know that our support is worldwide and appreciated more than we could ever express. We receive donations from 26 different countries worldwide – THANK YOU! (Instagram, 2018)". These examples illustrate that social media are, indeed, providing a platform that can transcend national borders (Seo et al., 2009) and that some NGOs are using it to their advantage by connecting with these global virtual communities.

4.2.1. The power of visuals in anti-poaching campaigns

Most posts consist of a combination of text and visuals (Facebook: 96.9%, Instagram: 100%). For Instagram visuals are one of the main ways to communicate and it is even a prerequisite to add some sort of a visual to actually be able to post. Therefore, not surprisingly all posts on Instagram use visuals. For Facebook, however, it is not necessary to include visuals. Yet, only 2.9% of the content does not have some sort of visual connected to it. For both Facebook and Instagram most of these visuals are photographs.

The results demonstrate that NGOs post shocking pictures to create more awareness about the ongoing struggle. These shocking posts included, for example, images of dead dehorned rhinos or tells the story about how orphaned rhinos have little chance of surviving without their mother. One example consisted of a picture of a conservationists holding an unborn baby rhino in his arms and stated: "An absolutely heart breaking photo of a baby rhino, who never even had the chance to live… #Repost @benswildlife". Poachers had killed its mother for her horns, but in the process also killed the foetus. The post was reposted by Chipembere Rhino Foundation on their Instagram (and Facebook) and besides their own contribution, they also used the conservationist's (@benswildlife) story in their post to stress the shocking story.

*Figure 11*. Unborn baby rhino. (Chipembere Rhino Foundation Instagram, 2018).

Although the NGOs analysed focus on a very serious cause, they also use visuals of a very different nature. A portion of the posts included cute pictures of animals, such as baby rhinos and elephants. In addition, NGOs also use humorous visuals on their social media platforms, by posting pictures of funny situations some of the animals get themselves into.

Besides photos, some NGOs also use videos to enhance their message. On Facebook 12.3% of the visuals include videos, but on Instagram only 3.4% consist of videos. This

shows that Instagram is apparently still used more for still visuals than for moving visuals by NGOs.

Figure 12 & 13. Visual types per social media platform
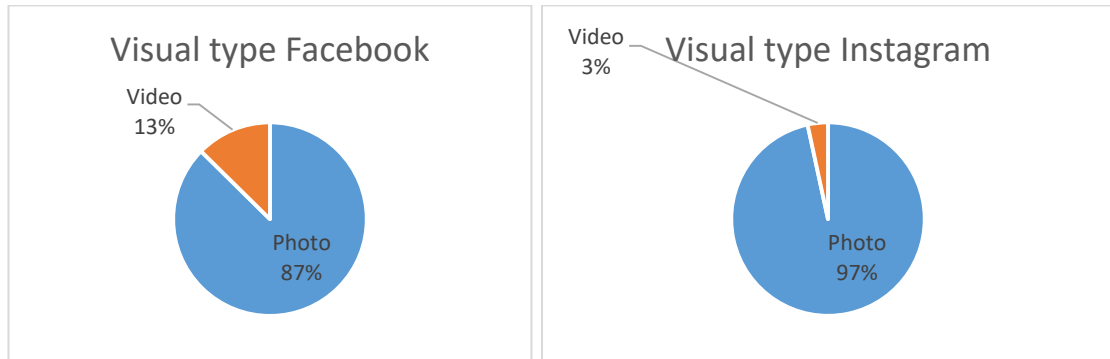
The posted videos are different in nature, some include images of rangers on the job or inform the public about the cause, while others show beautiful images of animals and the African landscape. Some also use videos to shock their followers. An example, posted by Save the Rhino International showed a mother rhino that had been poached and her calf still trying to suckle from the mother. This video got a lot of response from the public (16.000 likes, 182 comments and 324 shares). Another interesting video posted by the same NGO showed an animated rhino from a sideview walking through an animated African landscape. Then, the camera fanned around the rhino and the viewers could see it was a robotic rhino. Next, the words: "Don't let this be the future" appeared. This video got 437 likes, 17 comments and was shared 276 times. Moreover, it was viewed more than 15.000 times. By combining moving images and text, these posts convey a powerful message which is disseminated via social media and ultimately reached a large (online) audience (Guo & Saxton, 2014).

Furthermore, a different case related to the power of visuals, is the use of GIFs by this same NGO. Save the Rhino International, posted a funny GIF of a baby rhino running towards the camera with the text: "It's FriYAY. Find out more about this amazing species: …" providing a link to a website. This post tries to relate to online audiences as it includes a funny GIF of a baby animal and mentions it is Friday (or FriYAY) using popular digital language and features. However, in the second sentence the NGO is also trying to create awareness and activate their followers by providing a link where they could "find out more about" the species. In this case, Save the Rhino International is using humour and a 'cute' GIF to draw people into the issue and make them more aware. GIF's are extremely popular

among the younger social media users and have become part of the digital culture (Yao, 2018). In 2018, Google bought the leading GIF making platform Tenor, and said there are millions of searches for GIFs every day. This overtake by Google shows the increasing importance of GIFs (Yao, 2018). It is therefore interesting to see that one NGO actually uses this type of visual. In another post, they also ask their followers to post a GIF in the comments. Nevertheless, this was still only done by one NGO and one post of the 1.007 analysed used a GIF as their main visual, showing that NGOs are not using all potential visual features available.

Additionally, one NGO paid extra attention to the visual appearance of their platform feed. Every couple of posts, Chengeta Wildlife Foundation posted their mission/vision on their Instagram, providing their followers with a letter and an explanation. For example: "Wisdom Wednesday from Chengeta! P stands for Policing:…" or "E stands for… Education and outreach…(Instagram, 2018)". Ultimately, their mission/vision of RESPECT shows on their Instagram feed as a word when read from bottom to top. Nowadays, the actual social media page or feed could be the first time potential followers come in contact with the organisation, therefore online appearance is starting to play a more important role. In this case, the NGO is playing into this trend by making sure the feed presents a good first impression. Nevertheless, it is still only one of the NGOs which is actively paying attention to this.

Overall, the anti-poaching NGOs are using the power of visuals to complement their text and to convey their message. Adding visuals to posts is generally more appealing to social media users (Carboni & Maxwell, 2015) and research has shown that audiences respond better to these types of posts (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Lovejoy et al., 2012).

4.2.2. Popular language and online trends on anti-poaching NGOs platforms

Another interesting aspect concerning most salient content is the use of popular language and online trends by NGOs. The results illuminate that the anti-poaching NGOs are leveraging some of these opportunities. An interesting finding showed that one NGO (Save the Rhino International) used a particular phrase in popular digital language by prompting the public to come up with a caption for their and asked them to "Caption this". The "Caption this" phrase is used regularly on social media and, although it was just one NGO who used this, it is interesting to see that NGOs are becoming more aware of these new ways of engaging with their audience. Furthermore, some NGOs use emojis in their posts to appeal to

their online public, by including, for example, emojis of rhinos or the 'hearteye emoji' in their message.

In addition, NGOs also use special days and occasions to communicate with their online audience and benefit from certain online trends. These specific occasions range from public holidays, such a Christmas and Thanksgiving, to special days, such as Mother's Day and Endangered Species Day. On Christmas and Thanksgiving, the NGOs play on followers' emotions, by asking them for donations or making them aware of animals' suffering. Other posts just wish followers a Merry Christmas and show, for example, a picture of the team wearing Christmas hats stating: "The Chengeta Wildlife team would like to wish all our supporters a Happy Festive Season, Happy Christmas, and all the best for the New Year. Your continues support is appreciated! (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Facebook, 2018)". On Thanksgiving NGOs generally post a message giving thanks to their supporters and partners and highlight their online community: "To all our incredible supporters. This Thanksgiving, we want to share our genuine appreciation and gratitude for all your continued support. Without you, we would not be where we are today, and we're so thankful for all your support throughout the year. We hope you have a joyous holiday and we look forward to serving you again". But, in the same post also urge the public to keep up the support by donating to the cause: "If you would like to support our people on the ground, we would be so appreciative, and you can do so by donating to our crowdfunding campaign (Chipembere Rhino Foundation Facebook, 2018)".

On Mother's Day the NGOs generally post a cute picture of a mother and baby animal with the text: "Happy Mother's Day!". Or acknowledge moms by posting: "Thinking of all the moms of rangers, the moms and wives of our instructors, and of course the wild moms of the world on this day" (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Facebook, 2018). Moreover, NGOs generally also post special content on Valentine's Day to evoke certain emotions. One NGO created their own RHiNDR (instead of Tinder) app to create awareness and raise funds for their cause on Valentine's Day. Another interesting day that is highlighted by one NGO, is National Unicorn Day. On this day the NGO posted a picture of a rhino with a pink horn and a rainbow above it. The post says:

"A fun fact about chubby unicorns on #NationalUnicornDay. It is true that zoo-based rhinos sometimes leave behind piles of glitter: keepers wanting to test whether a rhino cow is pregnant will mix a little blue or silver glitter into their food, so that they can identify which

dung is which in the communal midden and then test the hormones in the glittery dung" (Save the Rhino International Facebook, 2018).

This NGO is using a new trend, surrounding unicorns and National Unicorn Day, and humour to provide a fun fact and grab their online audience's attention. On the specific wildlife days, such as World Rhino Day, the NGOs highlight their cause by mentioning there is still a lot that has to be done to save the animals and urge followers to keep on supporting them. On Endangered Species Day, Chengeta Wildlife Foundation, for example, posts: "It's endangered species day! Conservation of endangered animals is of utmost importance if we hope to allow future generations to see these incredible animals" (Instagram, 2018). Another day highlighted by certain NGOs is International Dog Day. As the use of tracking dogs in the battle against poaching is very important, some NGOs pay special attention to these animals. Chipembere Rhino Foundation posts: "Today we celebrate International Dog Day. "Man's best friend" has become an integral part of the fight against wildlife poaching. These dedicated canines form an incredible bond with their human handlers and it's this unwavering loyalty and drive for success that we honour on their special day today." They continue their post by mentioning the special project from which this collaboration can exist and end with different hashtags, among which #internationaldogday (Instagram, 2018).

4.2.3. Leveraging digital features for anti-poaching

The results show that, besides using popular language and online trends, anti-poaching NGOs also leverage certain digital features provided by social media. Some NGOs are actively using online usernames to tag and mention their stakeholders. This is especially present in the posts about partners and potential donors and relates to what Saxton & Guo (2015) coined as connection-building. Moreover, the findings suggest that, the smaller NGOs in particular, use this feature more frequently. The NGOs are directly targeting their online stakeholders and, in doing so, trying reach more people.

Certain NGOs leverage digital features by using the special event feature on Facebook to invite followers to join events in support of their cause. These events range from fundraising dinners to auction events and marathons. They create new events on their Facebook platform and invite their followers and potential supporters to join the event by clicking on the 'join' button provided by the platform.

Another interesting finding points to anti-poaching NGOs benefitting from hashtags. Hashtags were first used on Twitter back in 2007, but have now been transferred to other social media, such as Instagram and Facebook (Uses of hashtags, 2017). Hashtags can underline an important topic within a post and can be used as search terms, providing new ways for the post and the organisation to be found online (Saxton et al., 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019). Of the content posted on Facebook only 30.2% of the posts include hashtags. This number is significantly higher on Instagram, where 93.2% of the posts include hashtags. This is an interesting difference, but can be attributed to the fact that hashtags are generally more popular to use on certain platforms, such as Instagram than on Facebook (Uses of hashtags, 2017). Most hashtags used by the NGOs relate to the topic of (anti-)poaching. Examples are: #AntiPoaching and #StopRhinoPoaching. Other hashtags consisted of more general awareness messages such as: #WorthMoreAlive or played into the online community building aspect such as: #UnitedAgainstRhinoPoaching. Moreover, most NGOs also included more specific hashtags stressing the organisations' specific cause, animal or mission and included personalized hashtags with their name (e.g. #ChengetaWildlifeFoundation). Interestingly, some posts also included popular Instagram hashtags such as #FunFactFriday, #WisdomWednesday and #InstaNature, playing into the popular digital language present on social media.

Continuing, NGOs also use certain (popular) hashtags for advocacy purposes, urging followers to support the cause by adding hashtags such as #PleaseHelpUsSaveOurRhino and #Support to their message (Saxton et al., 2015; Xu & Saxton, 2019). A frequently used hashtag is #GivingTuesday. This hashtags was invented to raise funds for causes around the world. It was dubbed #GivingTuesday because it was first coined in the United States of America on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving (Giving Tuesday, n.d.). Today, this hashtag is used to celebrate and support giving and philanthropy throughout the year.

Figure 14. #GivingTuesday. (Chengeta Wildlife Foundation Facebook, 2018).

Furthermore, one of the NGOs used another interesting feature provided by Facebook. Save the Rhino International created a poll on their platform asking their followers: "What do you think is legal in the UK: - nothing at all OR – older antique horn items? (Facebook, 2018)". And followers actually responded to the poll. However, this was only used once in the whole sample analysed.

Besides creating awareness about their cause, an imperative element of NGOs' existence is their source of income. Before the Web 2.0, NGOs would appeal for donations via the traditional media. Nowadays, NGOs also use social media to generate these donations. They appeal for donations in their posts by asking followers to donate offline, as well as online. These types of posts would state, for example, "Do you want to make a difference? Please support our cause and donate here… #UnitedAgainstRhinoPoaching" (Chipembere Rhino Foundation Facebook, 2018), providing a link to the website where they could potentially make their donation.

Some NGOs go a step further and use the special donate feature provided by Facebook, instead of providing a link. This feature enables the NGO to directly appeal for

money donations and the follower and potential supporter to directly donate by clicking on the button. There is no need for a special link and it therefore provides an even more effortless option (Waters & Feneley, 2013). Further, the special feature not only caters to a more accessible way to donate online (Goecks, 2008), it also shows how much money has already been donated. An interesting result shows that this element on its own invites engagement on the platform, as people see how much the post has been liked, but how little has actually been donated. In this particular situation, one person spoke up and commented: "So many likes, but so little donations…(Save the Rhino International Facebook, 2018)". This relates to the notion of "slacktivism" (Danyi & Chaudhri, 2018), where followers are liking the post, but not actually donating money. This non-committal of followers shows that, although NGOs are using certain affordances to raise funds, it does not necessarily result in all followers actually donating to the cause.

To sum up, anti-poaching NGOs communicate using specific content to convey their message. All posts consisted of text, but most benefit from the power of visuals to disseminate the anti-poaching NGOs message. Furthermore, NGOs tease out certain opportunities by using popular language and online trends, as well as digital features facilitated by these social media platforms.

4.3. NGOs engagement on social media

Engagement is a complex phenomenon that has proven to be of grave importance to NGOs as it can promote collective action and ultimately lead to greater impact (Nah & Saxton, 2012). Connecting to one's audience and being able to motivate and activate the public is the only way NGOs can actually make a change. They do not have the authority or ability to make laws themselves, but need support from the public to reach their goal and mission and to truly make a change in the world. Therefore, online engagement is of critical importance and NGOs try to leverage the affordances that social media provide for this. NGOs try to invite engagement in different ways by using certain features social media platforms offer and by eliciting online dialogue and trying to get the public to respond, connect and ultimately activate them. It is therefore interesting to research what posts elicit more engagement than others. According to different measurements of number of likes, comments, views, and on Facebook shares, certain results have come to light. Overall, the results show that there are on average more likes on Instagram than on Facebook. However, they also show that there are,

on average, more comments on Facebook. Therefore, this section has been divided into what posts elicit more engagement on Facebook and what posts elicit more engagement in Instagram.

### 4.3.1. Engagement on anti-poaching NGOs Facebook

Figure 15. Average engagement on Facebook
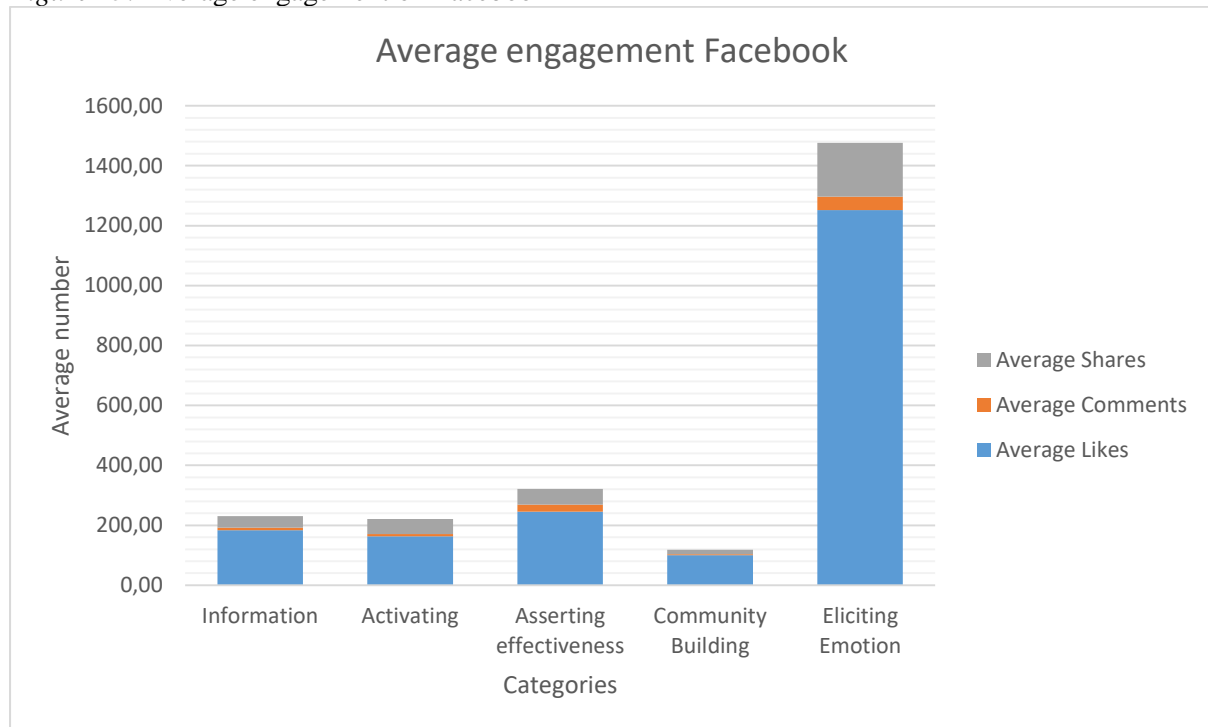
To investigate what posts elicit more engagement, it is interesting to look at the different categories and to analyse which posts are liked, commented on, viewed and shared most. On Facebook, there are major differences in the average amount of likes between the different categories. Moreover, the number of comments and shares also vary between the categories, with one category taking the lead. The data in the table show that, overall, the public is most responsive to 'eliciting emotion' attracting an average of 1251,89 likes, 44,83 comments and 179,82 shares. An example of one such picture showing a dehorned rhino got 2200 likes (which does not mean people actually 'like' the picture, this also includes other emotions such as angry or sad), 243 comments and 696 shares. Other shocking pictures received similar amounts of engagement. Generally, the followers are outraged about the picture and situation and voice their opinions in the comments section. Moreover, the graph below shows that these types of posts are shared more often than others, which means they reach a larger

audience, contributing to the electronic word of mouth and virality (Nelson, 2019; Algharabat et al., 2018), as the followers post these messages on their own platforms.

Figure 16. Average shares on Facebook
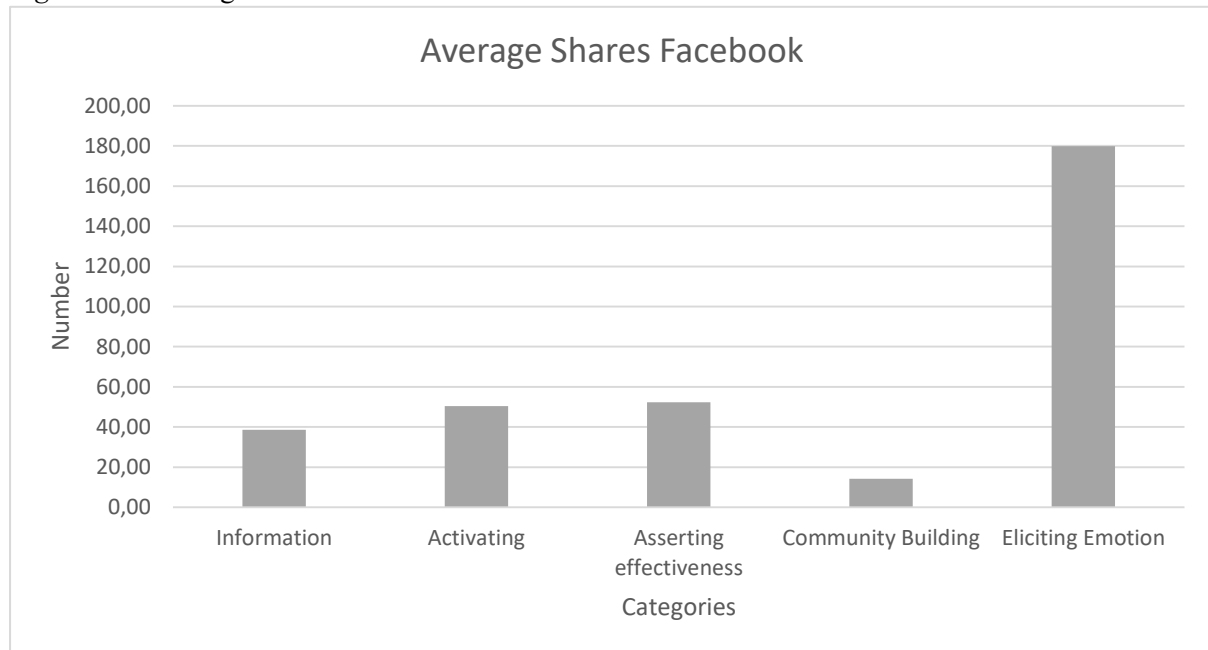
Besides shocking posts, this category also includes other posts that try to elicit emotion. One example which resulted in a lot of engagement (1000 likes, 24 comments and 166 shares), merely showed a picture of a new born baby rhino in a safari park in the UK. Another example of a video that received a lot of engagement consisted of a baby rhino playing with its mother and the text: "Melting my heart". This video got 1500 likes, 59 comments, 555 shares and ultimately reached 17000 views. Moreover, posts on certain days such as Mother's Days also create more response from the public. One example of a video posted for Mother's Day received 2300 likes, 91 comments, 1155 shares and was views over 32000 times. These types of posts elicit more engagement, as the online audience show their affection and appreciating by liking, commenting and sharing these posts more than others on Facebook.

Surprisingly, the least amount of engagement happens at the category 'community building'. This is interesting, as social media provide numerous opportunities for building a community online, as well as offline (Guo & Saxton, 2014). However, the results show that this category elicits least engagement for anti-poaching NGOs on Facebook.

On average, posts with a visual type included were liked 205.3 times whereas posts without visuals were only liked 75.8 times. Therefore, posts with visuals generate more likes and engagement with the public. Furthermore, most posts that included a visual consisted of photos (87%). However, on average, posts with a photo were liked 202.4 times, and posts with a video were liked 211 times. Thus, NGOs are getting slightly more engagement from videos than from photos, but still use photos more frequently.

As already mentioned, one of the most liked and shared visual posts posted by one of the NGOs was a GIF. This GIF of a baby rhino running towards the camera received 1100 likes, 42 comments and 259 shares and was watched over 265.000 times. GIFs are extremely popular on social media and NGOs could use this feature more to create engagement with their online audience.

4.3.2. Engagement on anti-poaching NGOs Instagram

Figure 17. Average engagement on Instagram
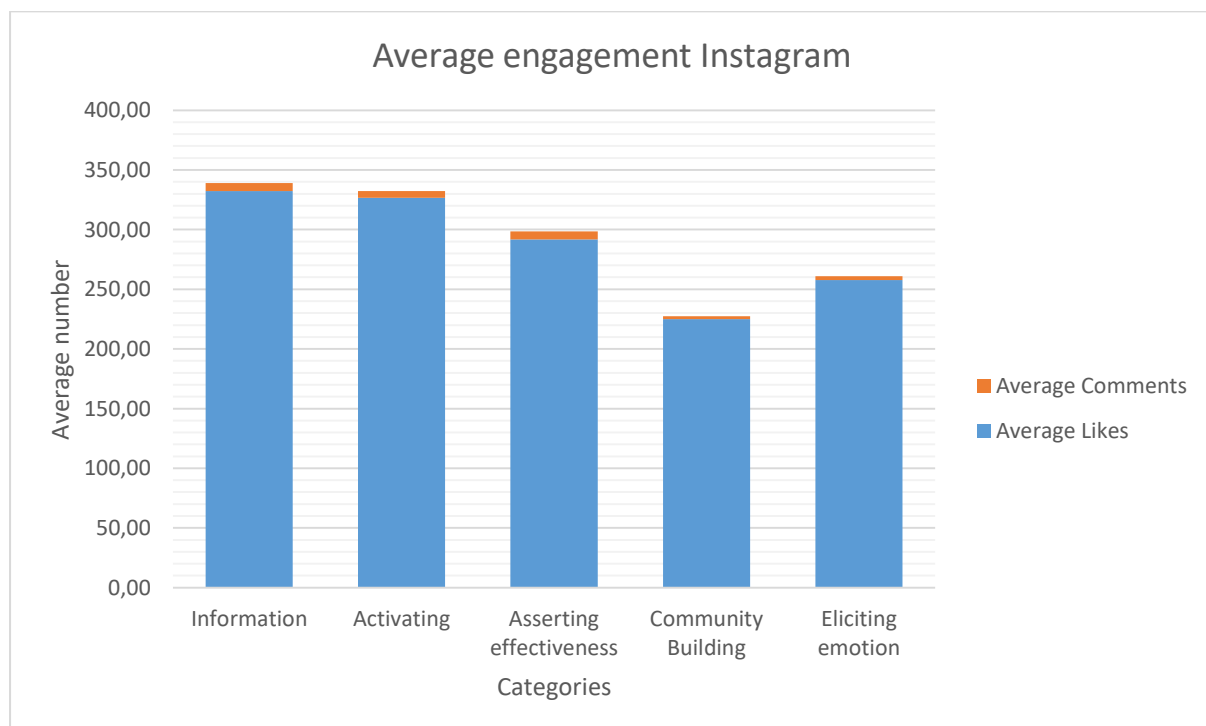
For Instagram there are less major differences between the categories analysed. However, the table shows that some categories do elicit more engagement than others. The category 'information' has most engagement, followed by the category 'activating'. On average posts that were informative got 332.42 likes and 6.68 comments. They try to create engagement

with potential supporters by spreading their message on the Internet. Besides solely informing the public, some examples of posts attributed to 'information' consisted of knowledge posts. One post by Save the Rhino International that tries to educate their followers got 1.152 likes and said: "There is actually no colour difference between the black and the white rhino species. The "white" component of the name may have resulted from a mistranslation of the Afrikaans word "wyd" meaning "wide" #rhino #whiterhino #rhinoceros #rhinoconservation #wildlifeconservation #thursdaythoughts". These types of posts elicit most engagement on anti-poaching NGOs Instagram. As the information category constitutes more than half of all the posts analysed, it is interesting to see that some of these posts are, apparently, also trying to create some sort of engagement on Instagram.

Moreover, the second category creating most engagement on Instagram is 'activating'. This category got, on average, 326.70 likes and 5.72 comments. Activating posts, in fact, elicit more engagement than other posts on Instagram. This is an interesting result for NGOs, as they always try to activate people to support their cause (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2014). One example of an activating post got 767 likes and 16 comments. Another example appeals for donations in the text but also tries to create awareness in the included visual. The photo shows a rhino and the text: "In just a decade, more than 7,245 African rhinos have been killed by poachers" and the caption section reads: "4 says to go until #WorldRhinoDay and 4 reasons to donate. If every one of our followers donates just 1 pound we could pay for the yearly salary of over 600 anti-poaching rangers to protect rhino. Donate today. [Fundraiser link in bio]." This is an interesting example because the NGO specifically targets their online audience by mentioning what they could do with the money if all their followers would donate just one pound. This post received 753 likes and 26 comments. People responded by liking the post and some actually commented they had donated.

Further, eliciting emotion is apparently not as interesting for NGOs Instagram followers as it is for NGOs Facebook followers. This is interesting as Instagram is generally seen as less serious platform, but provides more engagement on serious issues.
Yet, on Facebook providing information and creating awareness did not receive a lot of engagement. This shows that followers like different types of posts on the different platforms and that in some cases information is actually eliciting engagement.

Not surprisingly, most posts on Instagram use photos as their visual. Only 3% of all posts included a video. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean these posts receive most engagement. On average photos were liked 291 times, whereas videos were liked 497 times.

Therefore, it could be interesting for NGOs to focus more on videos than on photos as content for Instagram as those types of posts elicit more engagement.

In conclusion, after analysing what posts elicit more engagement it shows that there are differences between Facebook and Instagram. NGOs who post content that include a video and try to elicit emotion, by posting a cute or funny post or a shocking post, create more engagement with their online audience on Facebook than posting other types of posts. On Instagram, however, NGOs should post informative or activating messages, which include a video, to get more response from their followers.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis was motivated by the urgent issue of animal poaching in Africa and the potential affordances of social media for NGOs concerned with this issue. Although the number of social media users, including organisation such as NGOs, continues to grow worldwide (Kemp, 2019) and social media have proven to benefit organisations in different ways (Guo & Saxton, 2012; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), research about how NGOs use social media for their battle against poaching in Africa is understudied. Due to these growing numbers of users and the potential opportunities for NGOs to exploit social media, this qualitative research aimed to determine in what ways NGOs communicate on their platforms about poaching, what content was most salient, how NGOs invite engagement and what posts elicit more engagement.

Overall, the results show that NGOs use both Facebook and Instagram to communicate with their online following, but post less content on Instagram. Also, the posts on Facebook and Instagram are not unique, meaning there is an overlap between the posted content on both platforms. The findings indicate that anti-poaching NGOs use five different communication strategies on their social media platforms (i.e. Facebook and Instagram). These communication strategies are: information, activating, community building, asserting effectiveness and eliciting emotion. Of these, the three most used communication strategies (i.e. information, activating and community building) are the same for both Facebook and Instagram. Anti-poaching NGOs predominately use their social media for informational purposes, which reinforces previous studies suggesting NGOs are using their platforms to spread information instead of using other ways to communicate (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2012). However, the results demonstrate that anti-poaching NGOs also use activating and community building as their online communication strategies, countering existing literature that claim NGOs are not using their platforms for these purposes (Saxton et al., 2015; Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Moreover, the NGOs use their platforms to elicit dialogue and engage with their audience by asking them questions and asking them to comment on posts, indicating they benefit from the electronic word of mouth (Algharabat et al., 2018) provided by social media. Furthermore, they recruit potential employees and interns via their channels and thank their stakeholders. In doing so, the NGOs use the opportunity provided by social media to reach a very large following (Nelson, 2019; Felix et al., 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and to potentially reach supporters and future employees.

Nevertheless, the results also suggest not all communication strategies are used as frequently, with eliciting emotion and asserting effectiveness being the least used ways to communicate on social media. Interestingly, the least used strategy differed between Facebook and Instagram, demonstrating that NGOs do not use their platforms for the same types of messages.

All content analysed included text and most of the posts were written in English. However, some NGOs truly underlined the importance of their global (online) community by posting about their diverse following or actually writing their posts in a different language. This shows that, although anti-poaching NGOs focus on a more localized issue, they are using their platforms to disseminate messages that transcend national borders (Seo, et al., 2009), by highlighting their global community as well as posting content specifically targeted at certain countries.

Further, most content included some type of visual, consisting of either photos or videos, suggesting that NGOs are using these services provided by social media accordingly as online audiences respond better to different forms of visuals (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Carboni & Maxwell, 2015; Lovejoy et al., 2012). They use these visuals to complement their text and create a more visually appealing post. Anti-poaching NGOs also use visuals to evoke certain emotions from their online audience. They post shocking pictures of poached animals and show videos of doom scenarios. Also, they post cute pictures of baby animals or funny visuals. By using shocking, cute and funny visuals they wish to create more awareness about their cause and potentially reach more people online which correlates with existing studies suggesting that emotional posts elicit more virality (Nikolinakou & King, 2018).

In addition, the findings demonstrate that anti-poaching NGOs also leverage other affordances provided by social media. They use popular language and online trends to spread their message and reach their online followers. By using particular phrases and posting on specific occasions and days, they appeal to their online user's everyday life and make their cause more relatable (Alonso-Canadas et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the NGOs use digital features provided by social media throughout their posts. They mention @USERNAMES and tag partners, directly targeting (potential) stakeholders on social media and trying to create engagement (Xu & Saxton, 2019). This corresponds with previous literature as they highlight their online presence and shows they want to connect with their virtual community (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Nelson, 2019; Saxton et al., 2015). Further, mentioning @USERNAMES can also contribute to the NGOs

trustworthiness as it acknowledges the online presence of their partners and in doing so, also enhances their own online presence and makes them relevant (Saxton & Guo, 2015).

Moreover, NGOs actively use hashtags to create awareness about their issue online. Hashtags facilitate the anti-poaching NGOs to join or even create online conversations. This, in turn, contributes to the NGOs online reputation as being an active participant (Xu & Saxton, 2019). Furthermore, it illustrates how NGOs use certain aspects of social media as an interactive tool through stakeholder-organisation communication and leveraging the networking strategy by using these digital features (Meijer & Thaens, 2010). In addition, anti-poaching NGOs activate their online audience by using popular hashtags, such as #GivingTuesday. They appeal for funds by riding on trending and popular hashtags and, in this case, join the online community of Giving Tuesday (Xu & Saxton, 2019). Related to this is the fact that anti-poaching NGOs also use the special event and donate features provided by Facebook. They activate their online followers to either join an event and therefore contribute to the cause offline or donate via the feature provided online.

By using popular language, referring to online movements, mentioning usernames, leveraging digital features and using trending hashtags, the NGOs join the online conversation and reach more people (Nelson, 2019; Saxton et al., 2015). This demonstrates that, contrary to previous literature (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters et al., 2009; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Raja-Yusof et al., 2016), anti-poaching NGOs do, in fact, use certain affordances of social media.

All in all, the results illuminate interesting findings for NGOs online stakeholder engagement. Firstly, the differences found between what posts elicit more engagement between Facebook and Instagram, reinforce the notion that the NGOs are using the platforms to disseminate different kinds of messages. In terms of trying to create favourable circumstances for online stakeholder engagement, NGOs should be aware of this. On Facebook, eliciting emotion received most engagement. This is surprising as eliciting emotion was one of the least prominently used communication strategies by NGOs on this social medium. This implies that NGOs do not use Facebook to its full potential in terms of engaging with their online stakeholders. Further, although community building was one of the most prominent categories in terms of communication strategies used, it received least engagement on Facebook, indicating that NGOs do use Facebook for this purpose, but are not necessarily reaping the benefits it could potentially provide. These findings correlate with

previous literature stating that NGOs do not fully engage with their stakeholders online (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters et al., 2009).

Interestingly, for Instagram the category information turned out to be the one eliciting most engagement. Providing general information and information about the company or cause allows for more transparency of the organisation (Svensson et al., 2015). This contributes to the legitimacy and transparency (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014) of the NGO and is therefore very important. Therefore anti-poaching NGOs are, in fact, leveraging the convenience of engagement on Instagram, as the majority of their posts consists of informative posts and these posts are eliciting engagement. Moreover, the second category receiving most engagement on Instagram was activating. This suggests that certain calls to action are being heard and could potentially be acted on by supporters (Goecks et al., 2008). This result, therefore, demonstrates that anti-poaching NGOs engagement on Instagram contradicts existing knowledge about online stakeholder engagement (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). Surprisingly, the posts that elicit least engagement on Instagram consist of posts related to evoking certain emotions from their online audience. This also counters existing literature implying that eliciting emotion creates more engagement (Xu & Saxton, 2019; Nikolinakou & King 2018).

Lastly, the results also point to a major increase in engagement with regards to the use of visuals. Although both platforms use photographs more than videos, the findings indicate that videos receive more engagement. Therefore, NGOs could potentially elicit more engagement and reach if they were to focus more on posting videos to complement their text, other than photographs.

5.1 Practical implications

Due to the growing potential of social media in terms of reach and engagement for NGOs, as well as the lack of existing knowledge, this thesis also aims to offer insights for practitioners, especially for PR/(social)media staff of NGOs dealing with (anti-)poaching, on how to use different affordances provided by the social media platforms efficiently, and what more can be done to benefit from them. Moreover, this research provides insights into what posts elicit more engagement on the different platforms for these NGOs. Given the fact that NGOs are apparently still not using social media to their full potential, even though they could benefit these NGOs in their imminent quest to save African wildlife and there is a lack of research

about this particular niche of NGOs, these kinds of recommendations are becoming increasingly important.

Firstly, NGOs should pay more attention to the different ways in which they communicate on their social media. They are posting a lot of informative posts, whereas posts trying to elicit emotion are used less. This is inefficient as on Facebook, eliciting emotion receives most engagement. Therefore, a recommendation for NGOs Facebook could be to combine posts, by providing information but also relating to the online audience by, for example, using humour to enhance their message and reach more people online. Moreover, the NGOs use Facebook more than Instagram, while Instagram provides new opportunities to reach a new online audience and informative posts are received well on this platform. Therefore, a recommendation is to start using this medium more in the future.

Secondly, NGOs should definitely leverage the special features provided by social media. Some NGOs already use the event and donate feature, however not all of the NGOs examined used them. Therefore, it would be advisable for other NGOs to also start using these specific features. Moreover, they should be more aware of the digital trends and popular language used on social media. In doing so, they will relate to the online community and could potentially even reach new (younger) supporters. In addition, the relative ease provided by social media of being able to mention and tag partners and supporters creates more engagement, reach and online presence and should therefore be used more often by the anti-poaching NGOs. Furthermore, although NGOs already use hashtags quite effectively, these hashtags are very different in nature, even though all the NGOs analysed focus on the same cause. Therefore, a recommendation is to try and come up with a communal hashtag that unites them as anti-poaching NGOs. This will enhance their online presence and strengthen their community, which, in turn, could create more awareness about the cause and reach more people.

Another recommendation relates to the use of visuals. The results clearly show that videos elicit more engagement than photographs. Furthermore, social media now provide the opportunity for videos to start playing as soon as the viewers sees it on their feed, meaning the chance of people seeing your video increases. Thus, although videos are more expensive and time-consuming to make than photographs, it is advisable for NGOs to invest more time and resources in video making as a way of spreading the message about their cause.

5.2. Limitations

Overall, this research offered valuable insights into how NGOs use social media for their battle against poaching in Africa. Although this research was conducted accurately, it did present several limitations that need to be addressed.

As the researcher has been the one analysing the content, the subjective approach in qualitative research has to be pointed out as one of the limitations. Although a table was provided with examples of what types of posts were attributed to which communication category, the research is still prone to subjectivity. Even though bias was avoided by keeping to the descriptions of the categories, due to personal interests and knowledge, it was sometimes difficult to refrain from using this while analysing the posts.

A second limitation that should be discussed is that, although two separate platforms were analysed, the same criteria were used for both platforms. This can be perceived as a limitation because the platforms have specific features and options. Therefore, it would be better to create specific separate criteria for the two platforms that were analysed.

Moreover, even though the amount of content analysed was in accordance with the ESHCC *Methodological Guidelines*, it still consisted of content from only six NGOs in total. Ideally, this sample should have included more NGOs so more content could be analysed and complete saturation ensured. Further, it only highlights the social media use of these specific NGOs. Therefore, more NGOs would have enhanced the research as this would have portrayed more diverse results. In addition, although this research sought to analyse NGOs social media use in Africa, not all NGOs were based in Africa. The fact that some NGOs were based in, for example the UK, could influence, for example, what resources they allocate to social media, and therefore how they use their social media. This might have been different to the ones located in Africa and can therefore be seen as a limitation.

Lastly, more than 1000 posts were analysed, which was in line with the ESHCC *Methodologic Guidelines* and ensured saturation for this research. However, these posts were not all unique. There was an overlap of an estimated 70% between the posts on Facebook and Instagram. This could be perceived as a limitation as the analysis was done on the same posts but on a different platform. Again, this relates to the subjectivity of this qualitative research, as the same posts might have been attributed to different categories on the different platforms by the researcher.

5.3. Directions for future research

The lack of literature about social media and anti-poaching NGOs in Africa made it important to conduct this research. However, this said, the study focused solely on one underrepresented niche of NGOs in one part of the developing world. Further studies should consider conducting similar research about other underrepresented causes. This could offer new insights into how other underrepresented NGO niches are using social media. Future studies could also move away from Africa and choose to investigate another part of the developing world to gain new insights and possibly find differences between upcoming areas in terms of how NGOs are using social media. In addition, researchers could also delve deeper into specific African countries, focussing solely on the use of social media by NGOs in that country. In doing so, they would achieve more in-depth knowledge on a local level.

Moreover, although this study provides a solid basis, prospective studies could focus on getting a better understanding of online stakeholder engagement. These studies could investigate engagement further by analysing the comments and online responses from both the stakeholders as well as the NGO itself. Also, analysing the Facebook sentiments (feature that allows users to respond with: sad, angry, funny etc.), instead of just using the likes, could provide new insights into how followers are actually responding to a post.

Lastly, this research focused on both Facebook and Instagram. Future research could look into the specific affordances of Instagram by focusing solely on this social medium. While Instagram is growing rapidly, there is still little research about this specific platform. Therefore, investigating how NGOs specifically use Instagram could provide unique insights into how NGOs use this particular platform.

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