

An exploration of the strategic implementation of marketing communication within social networking communication context.

E CLOETE

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Communications Studies at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University.

Supervisor: Mr S Bosch

Co-Supervisor: Dr L Holtzhausen

November 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I thank my study supervisors, Mr. S Bosch and Dr. L Holtzhausen for their on-going support and all the wisdom and guidance they dispensed during the course of my study. I especially thank them for the doing their best to assist me frequently, even in the midst of all the other numerous responsibilities they had during this time.
- I would like to thank Mrs. H Jonker for assisting me with the sourcing of additional literary sources throughout my study.
- I would like to thank all my friends that supported me during the course of my study – especially during the last few months where I was forced to neglect them because of my studies. Special mention to Mr D Kane who showed an immense amount of patience and always reminded me to be proud of my self-discipline and dedication.
- I would like to thank my current employers, Mrs J Olivier and Mr P Halderman for showing an unfathomable level of consideration for my extracurricular responsibilities and also for investing so much in me and risking so much for me in a time when I needed it the most.
- I thank my fellow Cyberkinetics employee, Mr C Van Wyk for his support on the account from which this study's main sampling source was drawn. Without his creative thinking, fresh approach and commitment, this study would not have been possible.
- I thank Ms. C Gibbens, the marketing manager of Acer Africa for her willingness to take part in the study and for being such an astounding, forward thinking client.
- I would like to thank my parents, Mr D.J. Cloete and Mrs. M Cloete for their on-going love, support and wisdom throughout my life – I owe all of my life to you.
- I thank Ms Ula van Zyl and Mr D.L. Kane for proofreading my dissertation for me.
- I would like to thank Ms M de Waal for taking a chance on me, kick-starting my career in the social media marketing industry.

KEY TERMS

Social media, social networking, social media marketing, marketing, Facebook marketing, Twitter marketing, marketing communications, marketing communications mix, professional social networking, strategic social networking, social media guidelines, social media strategy, social media action plan, action research, grounded theory.

SUMMARY

Taking into consideration the dramatic changes ushered in by the exponential growth of social networking, marketers are left without a dependable framework on how to implement social networking strategically and in alignment with other modern as well as traditional marketing disciplines. In light of this, the study aims to explore the strategic implementation of social networking within the context of a dependable marketing theoretical model, known as the marketing communications mix.

During the study's literary exploration, social networking's capacity as a viable professional marketing tool was discussed. Thereafter, the study's main theoretical underpinning, marketing communications was discussed and analysed.

During the empirical phase of the research, a process of grounded theory was firstly followed in order to compile a list of typical social networking communications actions that are performed on social networking platforms. The list of typical social networking communication actions were then compared with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix and consequently paired, based on their inherent similarities in regards to characteristics.

In an attempt to illustrate the practical use of the paring of social networking actions and the disciplines of the marketing communications mix, the empirical study conclusively followed a process of action research in order to analyse an organisation's social networking strategy. It was established that the model could possibly increase the strategic alignment of an organisation's social networking initiatives but that it should only be used as a guiding and adaptable framework as to not hamper the creative capacity of social networking marketing.

It was suggested that a follow-up study explore the ways in which social networking can complement and support other modern as well as traditional marketing initiatives as way to strengthen the case for an integrated approach to professional, strategic marketing.

SLEUTELTERME

Sosiale media, sosiale netwerke, sosiale media bemarking, bemarking, Facebook bemarking, Twitter bemarking, bemarkingskommunikasie, bemarkingskommunikasie mengsel, professionele sosiale netwerke, strategiese sosiale netwerke, sosiale media riglyne, sosiale media strategie, sosiale media aksieplan, aksienavorsing, gegronde teorie.

OPSOMMING

Die dramatiese veranderinge ingelui deur die eksponensiële groei van sosiale netwerke laat bemarkers sonder 'n betroubare raamwerk oor hoe om sosiale media strategies te implementeer, in ooreenstemming met ander modern, sowel as tradisionele bemarking dissiplines. In die lig van hierdie probleemstelling, stel die studie ten doel om die strategiese implementering van sosiale netwerke binne die konteks van 'n betroubare bemarking teoretiese model, bekend as die bemarkingskommunikasie mengsel te verken.

Tydens die studie se literêre verkenning is sosiale netwerke se kapasiteit as 'n praktiese en nuttige professionele bemarkingsinstrument bespreek. Daarnais die studie se hoof teoretiese onderbou, naamlik bemarkingskommunikasie bespreek en ontleed.

Gedurende die empiriese fase van die navorsing was eerstens, 'n proses van gegronde teorie gevolg ten einde 'n lys van tipiese sosiale media kommunikasie aksies, wat uitgevoer word op sosiale media platforms te identifiseer. Hierdie lys van tipiese sosiale media kommunikasie aksies is dan vergelyk met die vyf dissiplines van die bemarkingskommunikasie mengsel en is gevolglik belyn, gebaseer op hul ooreenkomste met betrekking tot inherente eienskappe.

In 'n poging om die praktiese gebruik van die belyning van sosiale netwerk-aksies met die dissiplines van die bemarkingskommunikasie mengsel te illustreer, is die empiriese studie gevolg deur 'n proses van aksienavorsing waar 'n organisasie se sosiale media strategie ontleed is. Daar is bevind dat hierdie model inderdaad kan aangewend word om die strategiese belyning van 'n organisasie se sosiale media-inisiatiewe te verhoog, maar dat dit slegs gebruik moet word as 'n leidende en aanpasbare raamwerk om sodoende nie die kreatiewe kapasiteit van sosiale media bemarking te belemmer nie.

Daar is voorgestel dat 'n opvolg studie die wyse waarop sosiale netwerke ander moderne, sowel as tradisionele bemarking inisiatiewe kan aanvul en ondersteun verken. So 'n studie kan die belangrikheid van 'n geïntegreerde benadering tot professionele, strategiese bemarking in die geheel versterk.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Theoretical framework: the marketing communications mix.....	4
1.3 Personal orientation towards the study.....	5
1.4 Problem statement.....	6
1.5 Specific research questions.....	6
1.6 Research objectives.....	7
1.6.1 General objective	7
1.6.2 Specific objectives.....	7
1.7 Guiding arguments and theoretical statements.....	7
1.8 Research methods.....	9
1.8.1 Literature review.....	9
1.8.2 Literature study.....	9
1.8.3 Empirical study.....	10
1.8.3.1 Phenomenological approach.....	10
1.8.3.2 Grounded theory.....	11
1.8.3.3 Action research.....	12
1.9 Delimitation of the study.....	13
1.10 Dissertation outline.....	14

CHAPTER 2: PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKING

2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 An introduction to social networking and social networking marketing.....	17
2.3 Social networking platforms.....	19
2.3.1 Facebook	19
2.3.2 Twitter.....	20
2.4 The rise of social networking as a professional marketing tool.....	21
2.4.1 The global advent of professional social networking.....	21
2.4.2 The rise of professional social networking in South Africa.....	24
2.5 The influence of social networking as a professional marketing tool.....	26
2.6 The benefits of social networking as a professional marketing tool.....	29
2.7 The pitfalls and disadvantages of professional social networking	32
2.8 Conclusion	35

CHAPTER3: MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: THE 5 DISCIPLINES OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MIX AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Introduction.....	37
3.2 The evolution of modern marketing practice.....	38
3.2.1 The origins of marketing theory.....	38
3.2.2 The 4 P model of marketing	39
3.2.3 Criticism of the 4 P model and the rise of new marketing models.....	40
3.2.4 Modern marketing revolutions.....	41
3.2.5 Relationship marketing.....	42
3.3 Marketing communications and its strategic significance.....	45
3.4 The five disciplines of the marketing communications mix.....	50
3.4.1 Advertising.....	52
3.4.2 Sales promotion.....	53
3.4.3 Personal selling.....	55
3.4.4 Public relations.....	57
3.4.5 Direct marketing.....	59
3.5 General and strategic considerations when implementing the marketing communications mix ...	62
3.6 Conclusion	70

CHAPTER4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction.....	72
4.2 Overarching research philosophy: qualitative research.....	72
4.3 Research approach: qualitative phenomenology.....	75
4.4 Research methods.....	77
4.4.1 Grounded theory.....	77
4.4.2 Action research.....	79
4.5 Research process.....	82
4.6 Sampling source.....	88
4.6.1 Acer's strategic positioning.....	88
4.6.2 Acer's Space Renewed Challenge.....	89
4.6.2.1 Campaign objectives.....	89
4.6.2.2 Platforms utilised.....	89
4.6.2.3 Campaign concept &overview.....	90
4.6.2.4 Design &development.....	91
4.6.2.5 Campaign reporting & monitoring.....	91

4.6.2.6 Campaign results.....	91
4.7 Data selection	92
4.8 Research quality assurance.....	96
4.9 Conclusion.....	98

CHAPTER5: TYPICAL AND PAIRED SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIONS DEFINED BY MEANS GROUNDED THEORY

5.1Introduction.....	100
5.2. Typical social networking communication activities defined by means of grounded theory.....	100
5.2.1 Open coding of social networking messaging.....	101
5.2.2 Axial coding of social networking messaging.....	104
5.2.3 Selective coding of social networking messaging: social.....	107
5.2.3.1 Campaign messaging.....	108
5.2.3.2 Product and service.....	109
5.2.3.3 Brand messaging	111
5.2.3.4 Unrelated messaging.....	113
5.2.3.5 Advertised messaging.....	114
5.2.3.6 Hybrid messaging.....	115
5.3. Pairing of social networking actions and marketing communications mix disciplines.....	117
5.3.1 Campaign messaging and the sales promotion discipline	118
5.3.2 Product and service messaging and the direct marketing discipline.....	119
5.3.3 Brand messaging and the public relations discipline.....	120
5.3.4Unrelated messaging and the public relations discipline.....	120
5.3.5Advertised messaging and the advertising discipline.....	121
5.3.6 Unplanned messaging and the personal selling discipline.....	123
5.3.7 Hybrid messaging and the marketing communication mix disciplines.....	124
5.4 Conclusion.....	126

Chapter 6: A STRATEGIC GUIDELINE FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKING BY MEANS OF ACTION RESEARCH

6.1Introduction.....	127
6.2 Diagnosing: assessing the strategic alignment of the messaging strategy.....	127
6.2.1 Promotional campaign messaging (sales promotion)	128
6.2.2 Product and service messaging (direct marketing),.....	128

6.2.3 Brand messaging (public relations)	128
6.2.4 Unrelated messaging (public relations)	129
6.2.5 Advertised messaging (advertising)	129
6.2.6 Direct messaging (personal selling)	129
6.2.7 Hybrid messaging (Combination of marketing mix disciplines)	130
6.3 Action planning: planning changes to Acer's previous social networking messaging strategy	131
6.3.1 The key characteristics of each tool and how they contribute to marketing objective....	131
6.3.2 The influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers	133
6.3.3 Product complexity.....	133
6.3.4 The objectives of the Acer Space Renewed Challenge initiatives	134
6.3.5 Acer's global strategy.....	134
6.4 Diagnosing: assessing the strategic requirements of the messaging strategy.....	136
6.5 Action planning: the formulation of a new social networking messaging plan.....	138
6.6 Action taking: the implementation of the new content strategy.....	144
6.7 Evaluating: the impact of the new content strategy.....	149
6.8 Specify learning: the informed lessons learnt from the new content strategy.....	153
6.9 Conclusion.....	154

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction.....	156
7.2 Answering the research questions.....	156
7.2.1 The developing field of professional social networking.....	156
7.2.2 Marketing communications and the marketing communications mix.....	161
7.2.3 Typical social networking communication actions.	168
7.2.4 Pairing social networking actions with the marketing communications mix.....	169
7.2.5 A theoretical framework for implementing a social networking messaging strategy.....	171
7.3 Recommendations.....	172
7.3.1 Recommendation 1: Committed and informed social networking participation.....	172
7.3.2 Recommendation 2: A strategic approach to professional social networking	173
7.3.3 Recommendation 3: Utilising social networking initiatives to their full potential.....	174
7.3.4 Recommendation 4: An integrated approach to professional social networking	175
7.4 Shortcomings and suggestions for future research.....	175
7.4.1 Shortcomings of the study.....	175
7.4.2 Suggestions for future research.....	176
7.5 General Conclusion.....	176

Bibliography	178
---------------------------	-----

Annexure A: Social networking terminology	198
--	-----

Annexure B: Empirical sampling source	209
--	-----

TABLES

Table 2.1: The biggest social networking brand pages in South Africa.....	25
--	----

Table 3.1: The key characteristics of each discipline in the marketing communications mix.....	65
---	----

Table 4.1: The key characteristics of quantitative and qualitative.....	73
--	----

FIGURES(short list)

2.1: The Conversation Prism of social networking and related platforms.....	22
---	----

3.1: Each tool in the marketing communications' mix influence on the purchase decision process.....	66
---	----

3.2: Each discipline in the marketing communications mix's influence on the buying process.....	67
---	----

3.3: Type of product its influence on the choice of marketing communications mix disciplines.....	68
---	----

4.1: Susman and Evered's cyclical action research order.....	80
--	----

4.2: The applicability of the guiding arguments in relation to the phases of empirical research.....	87
--	----

4.3: A snippet of a social networking content calendar.....	93
---	----

5.1: The categorisation and sub-categorisation of typical social networking messaging	116
---	-----

5.2: Typical social networking messaging, paired with marketing communications.....	125
---	-----

6.1: The messaging allocation per social networking messaging category	141
--	-----

6.2: messaging content plan for the Acer and FNB joint October 201 campaign.....	142
--	-----

IMAGES(short list)

4.1: An example of an open status update that encourages user participation.....	94
--	----

4.2: An example of a close-ended status update on the Acer Africa Facebook page.....	94
--	----

4.3: Facebook cover pic promoting Acer product road show.....	95
---	----

4.4: A status update on the Acer Africa Facebook page.....	95
--	----

5.1: The introduction copy on the Space Renewed Challenge Facebook canvas.....	102
--	-----

5.2: A visual messaging example from the Space Renewed Challenge	107
--	-----

5.3: A visual and written messaging combination	110
---	-----

5.4: A visual and written messaging combination	112
---	-----

5.5: A member-centric message celebrating the Acer Facebook 10,000 likes milestone.....	113
---	-----

5.6: A written and visual messaging combination.....	113
5.7: A Facebook Marketplace ad that promoted the Space Renewed Challenge.....	114
6.1: A scheduled, promotional product & service message.....	144
6.2: A third party product and service message.....	145
6.3: A promotional campaign message.....	146
6.4: An unplanned brand partnership.....	146
6.5: A rescheduled supportive product and service message.....	147
6.6: A cover pic updated on the Acer Facebook page.....	148
6.7: An unrelated member-centric message.....	148
6.8: An effective promotional product and service update.....	149
6.9: An unplanned events related update.....	151
6.10: A timely, unrelated message.....	151
6.11: A member-centric unrelated message.....	152

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction

The concept of exchange is crucial to understanding marketing: for an exchange to take place there has to be two or more parties present that can offer something of value to each other and that are prepared to enter freely into the exchange (Fill, 2006:9). Consumers experience a greater sense of relational benefits when they take part in an exchange process or transaction with a high degree of personal contact (Kinard & Capella, 2006:365). Fill (2011:189) defines these types of transactions as 'relational exchanges' and note that they have the specific purpose of generating and maintaining long term relationships between a consumer and an organisation. This presents the basis of relationship marketing and is underpinned by the principles of trust and commitment.

Social networking platforms, such as Facebook, provide organisations with the ideal channel to strategically implement the principles of relationship marketing due to a consequence of social networking's capacity to allow organisations highly personal contact with their customers. Egan (2011:51) agrees, stating that the personal nature of social networking platforms offers numerous relational exchange benefits for organisations, imbuing organisations with human like personality characteristics. This leads to long-term relationships between organisations and consumers, as is the main objective of marketing initiatives based on the principles of relationship marketing (Egan, 2011:51). It becomes clear that social networking has an obvious association with the theoretical principles of relationship marketing and, therefore, justifies a deeper analysis thereof as a professional marketing mechanism. Levy (2010: 43) states that a corporate presence on social networking platforms, like Facebook, will help to humanise a brand and expose the true personality of a company.

The most fundamental distinction that needs to be made is between 'social networking' and 'social media'. According to Nations (2011:2), social media refers to "Any website or web service that utilizes a 'social' or 'Web 2.0' philosophy. This includes blogs, social networks, social news, wikis, etc." Weber (2009:5) defines 'social networks' as "places where people with a common interest or concern come together to meet people with similar interests, express themselves, and vent". Taking the similarities between these two definitions into consideration, the conclusion can be drawn that 'social networks' and 'social media' can be interchangeable in certain contexts. Lincoln (2009:9) states that it is a popular practice to define social networking in terms of certain specific social disciplines and platforms. In comparison, Nations (2011:2) define 'social networking as "The process of building online communities, often accomplished both through 'groups' and 'friends lists' that allow greater interaction on websites." Taking the general ambiguity and interchangeable use of these terms into consideration, the researcher

elects to use the term ‘social networking’ as an umbrella term from here on forth for all references to social networking platforms; the actions and activities performed on such platforms, as well as the field of social networking in a general sense¹.

Libert (2010:6) states that, as a business discipline, social networking allows organisations to accomplish their goals faster, better and more cheaply than ever before, whilst creating real value in rewarding and meaningful ways. Social networking “captures collective intelligence”, is “versatile and flexible” and makes it easy to “share information with small nichés” of people (Lincoln, 2009:10). Other benefits that are highlighted include better employee communications, targeted brand building, increased customer loyalty and the creation of a virtual presence that is not physically bound (Lincoln,2009:140; Chaffey *et al.*, 2009:369-371; Weber, 2009:25 and Jue *et al.*, 2011:79). Buss and Strauss (2009:147) add that social networking “offers opportunities to establish a dialogue between brand and customer; to engage in emotional marketing; to gain valuable insights about your brand and customer; viral recommendations; community recruitment” and more.

With these benefits in mind, it becomes clear that a strong presence on social networking platforms is becoming a strategic necessity for businesses, seeing that stakeholders now expect organisations to interact with them in the social networking arena as these networks are now regarded as official marketing channels. Therefore, organisations that fail to establish a strong social networking presence will lag behind their competitors. (Fang, 2010: 2). Solis (2010:20) agrees, stating that many high-profile (as well as smaller) organisations have started creating a social networking presence for their brand and that this has happened due to a combination of different factors that include increased social networking usage by current and potential customers; curiosity of how social networking networks can be used as business disciplines; necessity to compete with other brands or organisations; strategising to position the company in more markets and general trendiness.

Social networking is starting to receive a considerable amount of attention in South Africa specifically, with 67% of local marketers planning on increasing their use of blogs, Facebook, YouTube and videos, Twitter and LinkedIn (Van Heerden & Cant, 2010: 414). It becomes clear that there is adequate justification for the use of social networking as a useful marketing discipline that holds many organisational benefits. Even though thousands of companies have activated a social networking

¹Throughout the chapters of this study, a range of additional social networking and social networking related terminology not defined here will be used. However, an explanation of these terms will be attached as a reference (see Annexure A) for the sake of the reader.

presence for their brands and services, they do so without in-depth knowledge or an understanding of how to use these platforms strategically (Nelson-Field & Klose, 2012).

Fang (2010:2) does, however, warn that if social networking services are not used soundly, it can damage a business' reputation and image severely, as is the case with any channel that is used for marketing purposes. Weber (2009:3) explains that social networking, and the increasing prominence thereof, requires marketing practitioners to change into participants, instead of remaining mere broadcasters. In other words, marketers should participate, organise and encourage social networking participation instead of simply pushing messages to audience members on social networking platforms for them to interpret as they please (Weber, 2009: 4). This implies that social networking practitioners require a carefully crafted strategy for better utilisation of social networking platforms as business disciplines. Clapperton (2010:1) agrees and adds that organisations should not simply adopt a social networking strategy without proper business planning beforehand. Utilising social networking strategically, in conjunction with traditional marketing channels, is a sure way of achieving real business results (Clapperton, 2010:178). However, for such a strategy to be viable, a descriptive and relevant model of analysis is needed to understand the intricate principles of professional social networking. The choice of the model will, however, depend on the complexity and level of versatility of social networking itself as a marketing communications discipline.

The following observations are made with regards to the theoretical classification of social networking. As a developing field, many observations have been made with respect to the theoretical classification of social networking by a number of scholars. As Weber (2009:5) rightfully notes, communication is extremely one-way when it comes to traditional media formats, for example newspapers, radio and television that make use of one-way marketing techniques, such as advertising and sales promotion. Even though Lincoln (2009:10) believes that professional social networking's two-way and relational exchange approach to communication makes it more appropriate as a medium for marketing techniques such as personal selling, public relations and direct marketing, it is made up of different activities that might not fit equally under this umbrella term of two-way communication.

A clear example of this is that a Facebook status update can be used as a mere broadcasting (advertising) discipline for promotional content, or a direct attempt at building relationships by means of public relations inclined content. This is a crucial observation as it implies that there is much more complexity behind social networking's classification as an entirely two-way symmetrical communication discipline. This highlights the need for an all-encompassing model of analysis that presents a capacity for

both traditional and modern marketing techniques. One such model is Fill's (2011:18) marketing communications mix².

1.2 Theoretical framework: the marketing communications mix

Fill's (2006, 2009, 2011) marketing communications mix sprouts from the overarching umbrella term known as marketing communications, which is defined as "A management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences. By understanding an audience's communications environment, organisations seek to develop and present messages for its identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting upon responses." (Fill, 2006: 17).

Central to this management ideology is the realisation that an organisation has a specific set of disciplines that can be used in various combinations and different degrees of intensity to communicate strategically with targeted audiences (Fill, 2006:20). These five disciplines are advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations³ and direct marketing (Fill, 2011:18). The disciplines of the marketing communications mix were similarly defined by Lancaster and Massingham (1993), Smith (1998), Kitchen (1996), Lane and Russell (2001), Belch and Belch (2001), Smith and Taylor (2004), Duncan (2002) and Shrimp (2003).

Proper distinctions via an analysis of different typical social networking functions (e.g. a Facebook status update, Facebook advertising or 'tweets' on Twitter etc.) can prove that social networking actually incorporates all five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix. Knowing where each typical social networking function falls under the framework of the marketing communications mix is paramount to understanding social networking in its entirety, as it is this combination of smaller parts that make up social networking platforms as a whole.

Marketing practitioners who intend to use social networking as an organisational marketing discipline need to understand the differences between each discipline and its applicability to social networking clearly, as they will require this information in order to formulate a dependable and strategic social networking plan for their business. The frequently changing nature of social networking highlights the

²The marketing communications mix was previously referred to as the promotional mix within the traditional marketing communications definition (four P's of Marketing) by McCarthy (1960). The concept of promotion was adapted with the redevelopment of the four P's into the 4 C's of marketing by Shimizu (1973). See section 3.2 for more on these developments.

³The inclusion of public relations as a discipline within the marketing communications mix implies that public relations activities may be included in an integrated marketing communications programme. Although it is acknowledged that this could be contested from a public relations perspective, the inclusion of public relations in the promotional mix and marketing communications mix is an established and central principle of the field of marketing communications.

importance of this fact as social networking practitioners need to stay abreast of these changes if they are to use social networking platforms effectively.

In this study, Fill's (2011:18) marketing communications mix was shown to be a dependable model for analysing social networking activities, as it classifies marketing and communication activities by means of a structured, consistent and theoretical framework that is independent of the changing nature of social networking platforms. Categorising social networking activities under a marketing communications framework explains the inherent differences between all the typical social networking communication activities clearly. This can assist marketing practitioners in choosing the best combination and appropriate intensity level of each social networking function to promote, grow and accurately represent their organisation in the social networking sphere.

1.3 Personal orientation towards the study

Over the past few years, I⁴ (the researcher) have been actively involved in the marketing industry as a social networking manager, responsible for the administration and strategic planning of various organisations' social networking identity and social networking campaign activations. During this time, I have observed that organisations generally have no clear strategy with regards to managing their newfound social networking identity. This is mainly due to the fact that they perceive it as a totally foreign and separate marketing and communication discipline that does not conform to traditional industry best practices and strategic alignment. This results in organisations tending to manage their social networking initiatives by 'trial and error', applying blind hope that their efforts will bear fruits. Whilst this technique could potentially help organisations to get an idea of what is an effective strategy for social networking, it does lead to the unnecessary waste of company resources and possible damage to brand reputation.

From campaigns I have managed personally, I have learned that a strategically focussed and aligned approach to social networking initiatives is by far the most beneficial approach. One of the brands I manage in my capacity as a social networking manager is Acer, a global leader in the selling and manufacturing of laptops, personal computers and other related hardware. Whilst Acer's social networking has delivered commendable growth and exposure results due to proper planning and thoughtful implementation, it still lacks integration with the organisation's other marketing platforms. Furthermore, the results of Acer's social networking initiatives thus far are partly intangible, as a

⁴The use of the 'I' pronoun is exclusively used in section 1.3 of this study accentuates that this is the main personal ideology from which the study was approached. Section 1.8.3.1 explains the study's preference for the third person pronoun above the first person pronoun in all other sections of this study.

concrete model for the measurement of Acer's social networking success in relation to its more traditional marketing efforts have not yet been defined. The potential, therefore, exists for Acer to align their social networking efforts with other marketing communications initiatives in order to contextualise it within a familiar marketing framework for optimal strategic implementation. However, for such an approach to be possible, organisations such as Acer require a descriptive and practical breakdown of social networking as a business discipline, which uses traditional marketing science and theory to describe each individual element of social networking in a manageable and strategically tangible unit.

1.4 Problem statement

From the above academic exploration and the researcher's own personal observations, it is concluded that marketing practitioners find it difficult to use social networking as a professional business discipline, due to the fact that there is little or no distinction between the different communication activities that make up the world's biggest social networking platforms. Against this background, the following general research question is proposed:

How can the principles of marketing communications be strategically implemented within a social networking communication context?

1.5 Specific research questions

The specific research questions that are addressed in this study are:

RQ1.What are the characteristics, benefits and potential pitfalls of professional social networking and how did this field develop theoretically?

RQ2. What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix?

RQ3.What are the different communication activities typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence?

RQ4. How can social networking communication activities be paired with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, based on their theoretical resemblances?

RQ5. What will a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented entail?

1.6 Research objectives

The research objectives are in response to the research questions outlined in the preceding section and form a general objective, as well as specific objectives.

1.6.1 General objective

The study's general objective is to determine the manner in which the principles of marketing communications can be strategically implemented within a social networking communication context.

1.6.2 Specific objectives

This study aims:

1. To analyse, by means of a literature study, professional social networking, describing its characteristics, its rise as a business discipline, the benefits thereof, as well as its potential pitfalls.
2. To analyse, by means of a literature study, Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix according to the literature available on the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines.
3. To identify, by means of grounded theory, a list of communication activities that are typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence, according to an analysis of the world's two most prevalent social networking platforms, Facebook and Twitter.
4. To pair, by means of theoretical comparison, each of the communication activities identified with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix.
5. To formulate, by means of action research, a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented.

1.7 Guiding arguments

The following initial guiding arguments, substantiated from existing literature, are provided as the main motivations behind the study itself and its particulars. The significance of each is referenced during the study at particular instances when relevant:

- The use of social networking as a business discipline allows organisations to accomplish their marketing goals more effectively, whilst creating business value in rewarding and meaningful

ways (Libert, 2010:6). The organisational benefits of social networking include better employee communications, targeted brand building, increased customer loyalty, as well as the creation of a virtual presence that is not physically bound, as discussed by Lincoln (2009:140), Chaffey *et al.* (2009:369-371), Weber (2009:25) and Jue *et al.* (2011:79).

- Social networking initiatives need to be organised according to a well thought-out social networking strategy if the organisation is to obtain beneficial business results (Clapperton, 2010:178). A poorly planned approach to professional social networking initiatives can be dangerous to an organisation, damaging a business' reputation and image severely (Fang, 2010: 2).
- Without understanding the inherent qualities of a specific communication medium/platform, marketing practitioners will not be able to use those mediums effectively (McLuhan, 1964:8). This accentuates the need for a concise breakdown of social networking's different elements into tangible parts that can be properly analysed. Dissecting social networking should simplify the task of analysing the medium with the aim of aligning it with modern marketing theory and practice.
- Professional social networking should be integrated with traditional marketing efforts in order to ensure the best marketing results (Agresta & Bough, 2011:81). It therefore stands to reason that the use of a trusted marketing theory like Fill's (2011:18) marketing communications mix, that incorporates both traditional and modern forms of marketing will be a suitable theoretical model for the proper classification and analysis of social networking as a strategic, integrated business discipline.
- The qualitative research method of phenomenology aims to understand and describe the experience at hand as it is lived, i.e. from the individual's subjective perception of reality (Thompson & Walker, 1998:67). As the researcher in this study cannot distance himself from the actual research process, phenomenology will prove to be the ideal research approach, as it acknowledges the presence and impact of the study's inherent bias.

1.8 Research methods

1.8.1 Literature review

A search was conducted on the following databases: NEXUS; Ferdinand Postma Catalogue; SA Catalogue; International Theses and Dissertations; ISAP; EBSCOHost; Academic Search Premier; Business Source Premier; MCB Emerald and ScienceDirect to ensure that no other comparable study had been done previously. Many authors such as Abrahams (2009); Barnard (2010); Bettison (2009); Du Plessis (2010); Mulero (2010); Spanjaard (2008) and Phillips (2009) have suggested guidelines and general insight on how to manage professional social networking platforms successfully. However, this study differs significantly from available literature in its approach to social networking as a marketing communications discipline. Whilst previous studies have undertaken a global analysis of social networking platforms in order to propose guidelines, this study looked at the smallest, basic and most exact instances of communication and marketing activities on social networking platforms, suggesting guidelines based on a thorough analysis of each these communication and marketing activities.

1.8.2 Literature study

There are numerous points that had to be covered in detail during the literature study in order for this research to be contextualised and made relevant. Firstly, the main focus of the study, namely social networking's place as a professional business discipline, was substantiated and explained (see Chapter 2). To accomplish this, the following aspects were described: the characteristics of social networking; its rise as a prominent business discipline both globally and locally; the influence and effect of this rise in prominence; the benefits of social networking and, finally, the potential pitfalls to be considered when implementing social networking for organisational purposes. This literary exploration addressed the following research question of the study:

RQ1.What are the characteristics, benefits and potential pitfalls of professional social networking and how did this field develop theoretically?

The study's main literary context was then explored, namely Fill's (2011:18) marketing communications mix (see Chapter 3). As contextualisation to this discussion, the evolution of modern marketing theory from its traditional roots was outlined. Thereafter, a link between relationship marketing and professional social networking practice was attempted by accentuating similarities between the two fields. This connection introduced the reader to the viewpoint that social networking can be contextualised and analysed within a modern marketing framework. With this background established, the study explored the field of marketing communications and distilled the theory into its core tenets,

namely the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006) in order to supply themes for the research. This literary exploration addressed the following research question:

RQ2. What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix?

The literature study incorporated a variety of different sources, from marketing theory textbooks, books on marketing practice and theory, books on social networking, journal articles and online sources that contain insights into social networking practice. The study also touched on other marketing theories, such as relationship marketing to help substantiate claims made later during the research process.

1.8.3 Empirical study

1.8.3.1 Phenomenological approach

A closer look at traditional and modern marketing theory in Chapter 3 of this study established the quantitative research approach to be inadequate for the purpose of this study, as the inherent intricacies of organisational management and the consumers who engage with them need to be studied from a more subjective, involved viewpoint. Emotional cues and social networking sentiment are but some of the elements that were analysed, highlighting the need for a research philosophy that has the capacity to interpret biased, subjective metrics. With this in mind, it was reasoned that phenomenology was the best paradigm from which to approach this study.

From the philosophical basis of phenomenology, in contrast to the positivist tradition, it is believed that the researcher cannot be detached from his or her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:20). The researcher has obtained knowledge of the strategic intentions behind the social networking initiatives of the organisations he has worked for and has actively contributed to the formulation and implementation of these strategies. A phenomenological approach therefore ensured that these intrinsic considerations could be highlighted in the study, revealing a deeper insight into the relationship between each social networking action performed and the underlying strategy behind it.

Furthermore, other than following the traditional approach to phenomenology, which implies that the research process starts free from preconceived ideas or hypothesis (Husserl, 1970:221), the research rather followed a process of clarifying the manner in which interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings and making the researcher visible in the frame of the research as an interested and subjective actor instead of a detached impartial observer.

The researcher in this study has the unique position of working as a social networking manager for a range of organisations. This provided an opportunity for research to be done on one of the accounts that had given permission for research findings to be published. Acer, an international supplier of digital hardware and technology, was chosen as the organisational focus of this study, and more specifically, the South African (and to a certain extent, Africa) targeted social networking initiatives of Acer. The organisation was chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study; the researcher's proximity to and direct involvement in the organisation's marketing strategy and the total volume of social networking data available for analysis. The digital technology context in which this organisation operates was taken into account throughout the empirical research process, as well as in the concluding findings of the study.

The phenomenological approach, with its qualitative underpinnings provided a unique and rich understanding of the phenomenon of marketing communications within the realm of social networking in the South African context. This ensured that the findings were a realistic reflection of real world circumstances, making them highly applicable and relevant to modern business circumstances. This provided the opportunity to develop a better understanding of a relatively young field in the context of communication research, as it reflected the personal experiences and perceptions of the researcher in order to contrast these with theoretical assumptions found in literature.

The phenomenological approach could have been used to justify the presence of a first person ('I') highly involved researcher during the research process. It is however noted that for the sake of general academic standardisation, the first person pronoun was not utilised in this study. The researcher does not however deny his direct involvement in the study and bases this choice solely on the grounds of standard academic style.

1.8.3.2 Grounded theory

The direct and deep involvement of the researcher with client organisations in qualitative studies might hinder the research process, as personal bias could affect the conclusions made (Francis, 1991:35). This is a particularly detrimental obstacle when a conflict of interests exists. Because the researcher is indirectly employed by the organisation being studied (the researcher forms part of the marketing team that services the client), there was substantial reason for concern that a conflict of interest could have arisen, which would have biased the researcher to manipulate research findings or merely limit his objective interpretation of the research data itself. To prevent this issue from affecting the study's objectivity, the first segment of the study's empirical process was governed via the principles of grounded theory, during which a process of coding was followed that ensured data was rated

objectively and dependably, regardless of the researcher's proximity to the data being researched (Kock, 2004:265).

By means of the grounded theory approach, each individual message from the social networking sampling source (messages from the social networking platforms of Facebook and Twitter) was coded and interpreted via different stages of coding until a non-exhaustive list of typical social networking messaging groups or categories was defined. The research focussed on one social networking campaign of the client, stretching over a period of four weeks or more. When exhaustive data could not have been generated from a single campaign phase, the opportunity existed to extend the research in order to include additional social networking campaigns of the organisation. More specifically, the grounded theory process analysed a social networking content schedule, i.e. a planned and strategic calendar of updates that were implemented on a specific date and time on the client's social networking platforms. Grounded theory also served to question gaps in the data, both in terms of incomplete understandings and to ensure that the experiences observed were labelled sufficiently. This grounded theory process addressed the following research question:

RQ3. What are the different communication activities typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence?

Following the grounded theory process, a subsequent process of theoretical comparison was then implemented. The typical social networking actions identified were paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix by noting similarities between the theoretical characteristics of the marketing communications mix disciplines and the descriptions provided of each of the typical social networking actions previously identified. The labels of the social networking actions provided from the grounded theory process simplified the pairing process as similarities between the marketing disciplines and the social networking messaging types could be more distinctly observed as a result. This process aimed to answer the following research question:

RQ4. How can social networking communication activities be paired with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, based on their theoretical resemblances?

1.8.3.3 Action research

Thereafter, a process of action research was applied to the pairing model suggested from the grounded theory process in order to assess the practical applicability of the theoretical pairings. This ultimately aimed to prove that the theoretical pairings could be used as an overarching guideline on how

professional social networking activities can be strategically applied to better meet organisational marketing objectives.

This was done by firstly applying the created framework to the original sampling pool in order to assess if the overall marketing communications mix was represented to a balanced degree and that the particular combination of marketing communications mix elements reflected the strategic marketing objectives of the campaign in general. Secondly, the model was applied to an upcoming social networking campaign phase of the studied organisation, planning and implementing the new model according to the guidelines insinuated by the theoretical pairs. Afterwards, the newly implemented campaign was evaluated with regards to its benefits and shortcomings, ultimately leading to an assessment of whether the model can be used as a practical guideline by which to plan and implement professional social networking actions.

By incorporating these planned interventions that were studied as a relevant part of the actual social networking strategy of an organisation, the results and observations could be made applicable to both marketing theory and the strategic considerations of the organisation itself. When needed, communication activities, stemming from theory, that did not affiliate with the strategic alignment of the relevant organisation were implemented within the context of an intervention to instigate a self-reflective cycle. This action research process aimed to answer the study's final research question, namely:

RQ5. What will a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented entail?

1.9 Delimitation of the study

The researcher notes that in order to clearly define the study's main focus, the boundaries of the study need to be clearly defined. Even though the study attempted a thorough exploration of social networking theory, it is noted that the study did not discuss field specific methods of measuring the success of social networking initiatives. The researcher's own industry experience shows that marketing agencies and organisations alike have dramatically varied viewpoints regarding which metrics should be taken into account when measuring the success of their social networking campaigns and activations. Because of the ambiguity around this issue, the researcher opted not to consider these measurements and rather focussed on the development of a new social networking guideline that is grounded in a dependable and static framework of traditional, as well as modern marketing theory and practice. In line with this standpoint, the researcher also notes that typical social networking success metrics were not

considered as a prominent evaluative instrument in the final stages of the empirical process, but were included as mere illustrations of the all-encompassing effect of the model.

1.10 Dissertation outline

This study is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Professional social networking

This chapter validates the organisational importance of professional social networking by focussing on its characteristics, the development of the business field itself, the influence of social networking, the benefits thereof and the potential pitfalls that need to be considered when implementing social networking initiatives.

Chapter 3: Marketing communications, the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix and its strategic implementation

This chapter encapsulates the literary analysis of this study. As an introduction, the origins and development of traditional marketing theory are explored. Following that, the modern marketing theory of relationship marketing is briefly discussed in order to establish a link between social networking and modern marketing principles. With this link between social networking and marketing theory established, the study's main literary focus is introduced and discussed, namely marketing communications and its strategic significance. With marketing communications contextualised, each of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix disciplines are described, with practical social networking applications of each included. In conclusion, the general, as well as strategic considerations of implementing marketing communications and the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix are deliberated.

Chapter 4: Research Design and methodology

The overarching research philosophy of qualitative research is introduced, after which the specific research approach of qualitative phenomenology is explored. With the background of the overarching research ideology established, the study's two research methods are introduced and described, namely grounded theory and action research. The specific research steps are explained, focussing on practical descriptions of each step and how they could be applied to social networking data. The general sampling focus and the more specific data selected from the sampling pool are then reflected upon. In conclusion, the considerations required for assuring the quality of the research data and its findings are deliberated and practically illustrated.

Chapter 5: Typical and paired social networking actions defined by means grounded theory

In this chapter, the first part of the study's empirical process is documented. A process of grounded theory (as described in chapter 4) was implemented in order to identify a list of marketing communications activities that are typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence strategically. Next, the typical social networking actions identified were paired with one or more of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix disciplines, creating a link between social networking and the marketing communications mix. The relationship between the disciplines and the social networking actions was then explored in further detail, focussing on the identification of inherent links that signify the origins of a theoretical framework for strategic social networking implementation.

Chapter 6: A strategic guideline for planning and implementing professional social networking by means of action research

Following the grounded theory process of chapter 5, the guideline suggested by the theoretical pairings (based on the strategic considerations of marketing communications disciplines) were then applied to the original sampling pool in order to assess if a strategic balance between the marketing communications mix disciplines was achieved. The recommendations suggested were then transferred to an upcoming social networking campaign in order to evaluate the suggestions proposed, based on an analysis of benefits and shortcomings. Completing the action research process ultimately led to the proposal of a guideline by which to plan and implement professional social networking actions.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter provides a summary of each of the research chapters, focussing on the guiding arguments derived from each segment of the study and the manner in which each research aim was individually approached and fulfilled. Based on these insights and conclusions, the researcher discusses a series of recommendations detailing the strategic implementation of professional social networking actions within a marketing communications framework. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented and suggestions for additional and follow-up research topics are provided.

CHAPTER 2

PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKING

2.1 Introduction

With the study's main problem statement contextualised, this chapter will discuss the field of professional social networking under different categories. As introduction, the first section will deliberate the specific characteristics of social networking and the two social networking platforms from which data for the empirical phase of this study was extracted. Focus will then shift to the rise of professional social networking, focussing on both the increased popularity of social networking on a global and local scale. Thereafter, the influence of social networking and the changes it has brought to the modern marketing world will be analysed. Following that, the wide array of organisational benefits to be gained from a strategic social networking approach that contributes significantly to social networking's exponential growth will be highlighted and explored. Even with all these benefits, there are possible pitfalls that organisations need to be aware of when adopting social networking practices – these will be discussed as a conclusion to the topic of professional networking.

By doing so, this chapter of the study will aim to answer the first research question of this study, namely:

RQ1.What are the characteristics, benefits and potential pitfalls of professional social networking and how did this field develop theoretically?

This discussion will then also substantiate two of the study's main arguments:

1. The use of social networking as a business tool allows organisations to accomplish their marketing goals more effectively.
2. Social networking initiatives need to be organised according to a well thought out social networking strategy for best results.

This background will aim to validate social networking's organisational importance, making the importance of this study as a whole unarguably clear. The significance of this first section of the study is furthermore confirmed by one of the study's main arguments: Without understanding the inherent qualities of a specific communication medium or platform, marketing practitioners will not be able to use those mediums effectively (McLuhan, 1964:8). Kietzmann et al. (2011:241) agree with this standpoint, stating that professional social networking for example needs to firstly be broken down into its fundamental building blocks in order for marketers to be able to understand how to implement social

networking initiatives effectively. This accentuates the need for a concise breakdown of social networking's different elements into tangible parts that can be properly analysed. Dissecting social networking should simplify the task of analysing the medium with the aim of aligning it with modern marketing theory and practice. This analysis will provide the context from which the literary analysis in Chapter 3 will sprout, focussing on the marketing communications mix of Fill (2006) as a dependable model for analysing social networking's capacity as a modern business tool.

2.2 An introduction to social networking and social networking marketing

Seeing as social networking or social networking is still a decidedly new web phenomenon and is still expanding and increasing in scope on a daily basis, there are several different opinions around what exactly defines 'social networking'. Berthon *et al.* (2012:261) explains the meaning of social networking by referring to the evolution of the internet, referencing the terms 'Web 1.0' and 'Web 2.0'. Web 1.0 refers to the period that ushered in the start of the World Wide Web and was characterised by the need for organisations to create an online presence for their brand (Berthon *et al.*, 2012:261). Thereafter, the web dramatically expanded, ushering in new online capabilities like 'ecommerce' and the dramatic multiplication of available content that inevitably led to the new web era of Web 2.0 (Berthon *et al.*, 2012:262). Graham (2005) notes that the Web 2.0 age signifies the era in which businesses now fully embrace the web as a platform with a variety of strengths.

Lincoln (2009:7) states that social networking has been linked to the web phenomenon of 'Web 2.0', which is furthermore characterised by principles of 'interaction', 'participation' and 'reciprocity': "Web 2.0 is a web in which people can interact and participate rather than just read" (Lincoln, 2009:8). Lincoln (2009:8) elaborates that the sheer ambiguity of the term, however, has resulted in many researchers preferring the term 'social networking' or 'social networks' above 'Web 2.0'. Nevertheless, Berthon *et al.* (2012:262) notes that the terms 'Web 2.0' and 'social networking' are often used interchangeably because of their interdependent nature. Berthon *et al.* (2012:263), however, notes the difference between these two terms. Web 2.0 can be regarded as the 'technical infrastructure' that facilitates and hosts the user generated content created *during* social networking interactions between users.

Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010:61) definition of social networking supports this viewpoint: "A group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Observations made by Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:241) support the Web 2.0 origins of social networking, stating that, traditionally, consumers simply expended content on the internet, but in the new social networking age, consumers are utilising web platforms to a much greater extent by contributing, sharing, modifying and co-creating new content. Irrespective of the origins of social networking however, it is clear that it has become a

worldwide phenomenon that is discussed in modern academia and implemented by organisations in a professional degree (Khang, et al., 2012:280).

The most prevalent characteristics of social networking processes and social networking platforms are as follows. General characteristics of social networking platforms are that they are typically highly accessible (Brogan, 2010:97) and can be used to reach a highly representative general internet population (Zarella, 2010:1). Another interesting aspect of social networking that Lincoln (2009:19) touches upon is its 'infinite' nature, as conversations on social networking platforms never have definite beginnings and endings, mimicking real-life conversations between human beings who are in close proximity to each other. This highlights the need for a dedicated approach to social networking, as continuous attention ensures that a positive relationship exists between each participant of the communication process.

According to Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:242) social networking platforms utilised web-based technologies in order to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, converse and modify their own content. Bhanot (2012:47) notes that social networking is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value. In line with this, one of the characteristics of social networking is the fact that it focuses on 'user-generated' information, which implies that ordinary consumers have much more power and control in the way they communicate with each other, as well as companies: "Consumers want to be listened to rather than be listeners. They no longer want to respond to companies and their messages. They want companies to respond to them, and their individual, niche needs" (Lincoln, 2009:20).

Control over message creation and distribution is no longer possible when it comes to social networking, as the original message is instantly reinterpreted by different members partaking in the social network (Weber, 2009:29). Vollmer and Precourt (2008:1) agree with this statement, noting that consumers are now fully in control of communication – they have unlimited access to information and have a much better command over their own media consumption than ever before. Lipsman *et al.* (2012:40) add to this observation by stating that brands' messages can either be transmitted directly via the brand, re-shared by consumers that are subscribed to their social networking accounts, or via a paid messaging advertising medium. Communication is now less about creating contained messages and more about creating compelling environments where audiences and organisations alike can listen, as well as partake in conversations, with the most effective messages being those that combine the inputs of the company and their publics (Weber, 2009:39-40). These observations point directly to the reciprocal nature of social networking and how active participation is a key element thereof. In support of this reciprocal nature of social networking platforms, Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:243) observe that relationships are one of

fundamental building blocks of social networking platforms. Many popular social networking platforms, such as Facebook, are specifically focussed on the development and nurturing of human relationships between users partaking in them (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011: 243).

The above general exploration of social networking's characteristics has also hinted to the complexity of using this new medium as a marketing tool effectively, which will be discussed in further detail in section 2.7 of this chapter. The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2A

Functioning within a Web 2.0 framework, social networking platforms and the social networking processes undertaken on them form a flexible online community, where infinite conversations centred on co-created and user-generated content take place in order to connect with like-minded individuals.

2.3 Social networking platforms

The two platforms that will be focussed on during this study are Facebook and Twitter. These two platforms have been chosen because of their prominence in the world of professional social networking, the sheer size of the platforms and their general popularity amongst internet users and companies worldwide. Here follows a breakdown of Facebook and Twitter:

2.3.1 Facebook

Facebook was launched in 2004 and is the dominant social networking platform in today's modern age (Lipsman *et al.*, 2012:40), with more than 1 billion users worldwide (Whittaker, 2012). Facebook is a social networking platform that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them (Hall & Rosenberg, 2009:65). More particularly, it allows small business owners to expand their networks, communicate with potential and existing customers, and share business information through posts, pictures and videos (Hall & Rosenberg, 2009:65).

Facebook is specifically designed to be used as both an everyday or casual communication tool, as well as a professional business growth hub and has created a unique business niche for organisations to promote their brands and products, known as business pages (Fang, 2010:4). These business pages include a variety of marketing and PR related capabilities that organisations can utilise, as long as these activities fall in line with the promotional and business guidelines of each platform (Fang, 2010:4).

Newson *et al.* (2009:62) praise Facebook's advertising system as an effective way of marketing to a specific or broad target audience. Levy (2010:42) agrees, stating that the social networking platform provides an organisation the ideal opportunity to activate new fans by providing them with a community in which they can interact with one another and with your company. Reed (2011:140) states that there are over 160 million pages, groups and events on Facebook, and that the average user is connected to 60 of them: "Your customers are on Facebook – so you need to be."

On Facebook, the most typical metric for measuring success is to stimulate user interaction, whereas on Twitter, the focus is more on the accurate relaying of brand-related information and the degree to which this information is dispersed (Network Intellect, 2011): Furthermore, Facebook conversations provide marketers with an ideal opportunity to engage in insightful marketing research in the form of specific product, service and campaign feedback – this is mainly because Facebook users usually respond and interact more descriptively than they would on Twitter, seeing as the message length limitation is not applicable on Facebook (Network Intellect, 2011).

2.3.2 Twitter

Twitter has more than 200 million users worldwide and was launched in 2006. Morris (2009:17) emphasises that it is common practice to refer to Twitter as a 'microblogging' or 'nanoblogging' service, because of its simplistic and straightforward nature. Hall and Rosenberg (2009:96) define it as a social networking service using instant messaging, SMS, or a web interface to connect a global network of users. Whereas Facebook has an almost unlimited amount of add-ons and a diverse range of features, Twitter stays true to its simple premise: a user sends a text-based update (with a limit of 140 characters each) to his or her group of followers, which can then reply to that message or resend it to their own list of followers. As proof of Twitter's rise as a marketing tool, a research study undertaken by a digital communications agency, The Group, found that 56% of Financial Times and Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 companies now maintain an active presence on Twitter (Murphey, 2011).

Twitter also provides many opportunities for business growth, even though its more limited message length results in the need for a decidedly different message strategy in comparison to Facebook, where the options for message presentation is much more varied and complex (Fang, 2010:8). Newson *et al.* (2009:67), however, note that although the means of contributing to Twitter is simple and restricted, the opportunities for interaction are diverse, which include various third-party applications and add-ons that have expanded the applicability of this fast-growing business platform. Reed (2011:174) adds that Twitter provides organisations with an excellent opportunity to build a following as a trusted voice in a

specific field and that its sheer simplicity makes it a popular site for users who access the internet via mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones. Twitter gives brands the ability to track online consumer conversations about their industry, their products, buying trends, competitors and any other topic they might need a general perspective on – the ‘hashtag’ functionality of Twitter is the main method of conversation tracking (Network Intellect, 2011).

An insightful difference between Twitter and Facebook is that Twitter, unlike Facebook, provides users with the opportunity to maintain a state of anonymity in their communications, as users do not need to provide personal information in order to connect with other Twitter users, like they would on Facebook (Huberman *et al.*, 2009). Conversations on Twitter, therefore, tend to be more topical than personal, which implies that they expect brands to communicate in a similar degree. This implies that brands will be more effective if they keep more intimate and ‘soft’ conversations on Facebook and focus on relaying more serious and subject-related news bursts on Twitter.

A recent study by Hughes *et al.* (2012:561) goes as far as to suggest that there are specific and discernible personality traits that are directly related to a person’s preference between Facebook and Twitter: “These results suggest that those who are generally more gregarious and sociable will look to use Facebook more often, whilst less sociable individuals who are seeking cognitive stimulation will look to use Twitter.” Additional differences between the two platforms will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this study, when they are relevant to the study’s progression and interpretation. The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2B

Two of the world’s most prevalent social networking platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter consist of distinguishing traits such as the inherent functionality of each; difference in metrics for success; the respective business applications and the level of anonymity users can maintain on these platforms.

2.4 The rise of social networking as a professional marketing tool

2.4.1 The global advent of professional social networking

According to an E-Consultancy report (2009), social networking platforms started growing exponentially mainly because of the immediacy of a fast developing and changing internet infrastructure and the ease

with which those with a desire of self-expression could converse with a global audience. Kumar and Sundaram (2012:4) believe that social networking and social networking platforms continue to rise in prominence, not only because they allow a global network of people to instantly connect with one another, but also because of the diverse variety of communication options they provide to those who choose to interact via these networks. Levy (2010:1) states that over the past several years, “social networks have become increasingly popular as they made their way into mainstream society mainly due to the ability to communicate in both real-time and asynchronously with a wide group of people”. Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012:320) believe that the need for the creation of long term relationships between consumers and companies, as well as the general biological need to obtain a feeling of belongingness are other major factors that gave rise to the inevitable popularity of social networking platforms.

Levy (2010:2) continues his observations about the rise of social networking, mentioning the sheer magnitude of different social networking platforms currently available, which include Flickr, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Ning and many more. Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:245) support this statement, stating that there currently exists a rich and diverse ecosystem of social networking sites and platforms that all differ in scope and functionality. The Conversation Prism (figure 2.1) gives one a broad outlook of the most popular social networking and related platforms currently being used in the digital realm (Solis, 2010:19):

** Although only Twitter and Facebook are directly discussed in this study, a brief overview of social networking platforms is included in this contextualisation in order to highlight the sheer size of the social networking dominion from which the study originates.*

THE CONVERSATION PRISM

Brought to you by Brian Solis & JESS3

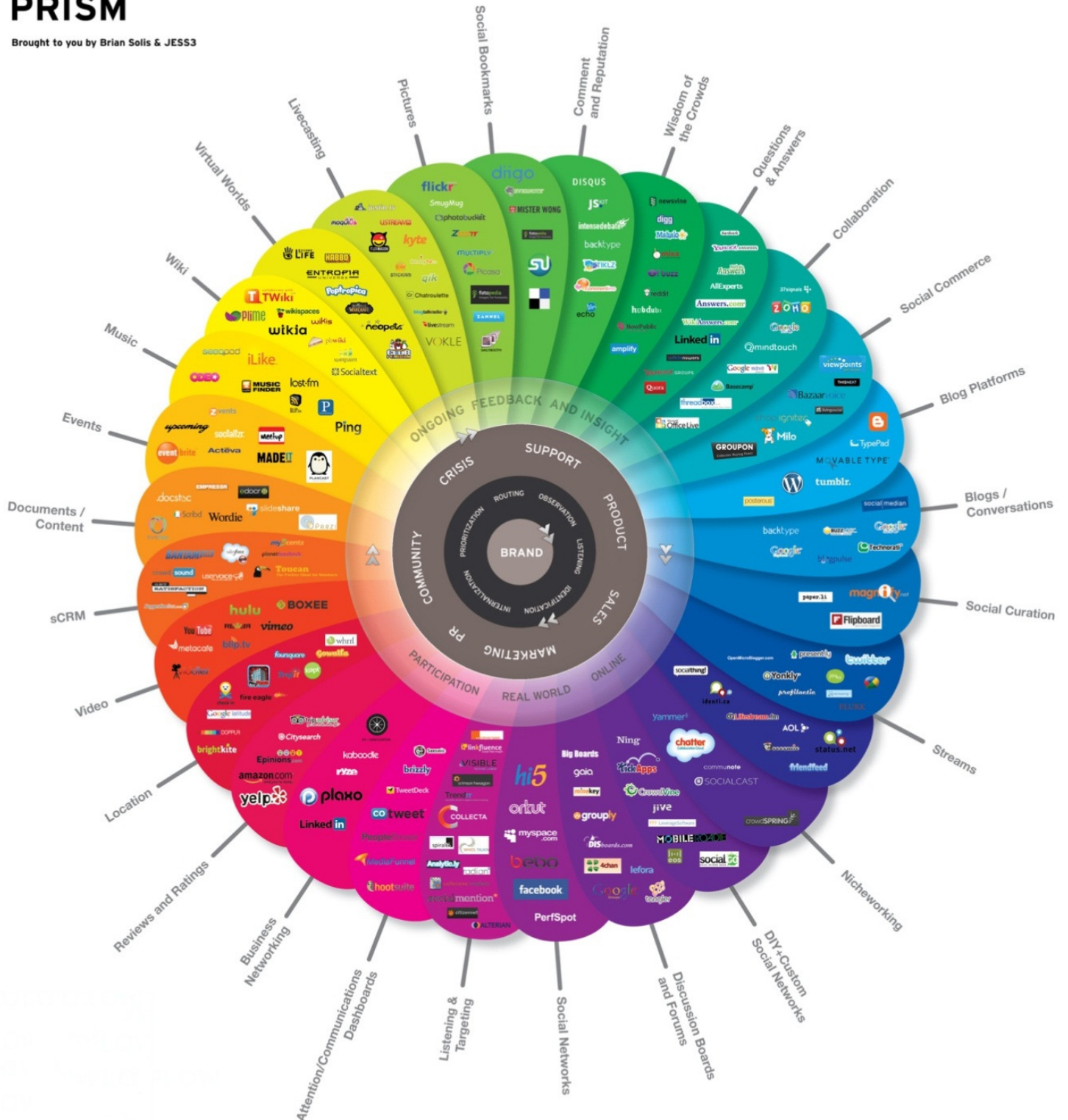


Figure 2.1: The Conversation Prism of social networking and related platforms(Solis, 2010:20)

Many high-profile and smaller companies have started creating a social networking presence for their brand on some of the world's most prevalent social networking platforms (Solis, 2010:20). This has happened due to a combination of different factors that include the popularity of the platforms; curiosity of how they can be used as business tools; necessity to compete with other brands and

companies; strategy to position a company in more markets; a need to be perceived as forward thinking and many more: “While dollars evaporate from traditional budgets previously ear-marked for advertising, public relations, events, and other [return-]on-investment (ROI) programs, individuals recognise social networking as a cost-effective venue for maintaining visibility, especially when compared to falling completely off the radar screens of potential customers, stakeholders and influencers” (Solis, 2010:20). It is this increasing perception of the importance of professional social networking investment from a corporate point of view that highlights the relevance of a research study that focuses on social networking’s capacity as a professional business tool.

The rise of social networking can also be attributed to the fact that it gives a single person the ability to grow and nurture any brand on a digital level, whether it is a personal brand or a large consumer brand, allowing for the management of one’s online reputation and much more (Levy, 2010:2). The monetary and economic value of professional social networking is another crucial reason for the quick rise of the phenomenon as a full-fledged business tool: “Social networks and blogs allow a wine store owner to connect with his community and help grow his business from \$4 million per year to over \$60 million per year” (Levy, 2010:42).

2.4.2 The rise of professional social networking in South Africa

A closer look at how social networking is used in South Africa is crucial, as to contextualise this study more precisely. Vermeulen (2012) notes that social networking services remain a profitable industry in South Africa, with 2012 seeing the launch of few new South Africa social networking services. As Van Heerden (2010:413) rightfully puts, it is common knowledge that a large part of Africa suffers from a severe lack of decent online and internet infrastructure, resulting in a noticeable problem when it comes to Africans’ access to online content. Taking this lack of access into consideration, it becomes questionable if the same benefits (as listed in the previous section of this study) of social networking is also applicable to South Africa, as a lack of access to these online services will render many of the listed benefits as irrelevant in the South African context.

A late 2009 TNS (Taylor Nelson Sofres) research survey on South Africans’ use of social networking incorporated a representative demographic of the South African online population in terms of age, race and gender and delivered interesting findings (Van Heerden, 2010:412). Firstly, only 12% of the total respondents indicated that they do not use any social networking services at all (Van Heerden, 2010:412). A study by Chatterbox Digital in April 2012 reveals that there are over 4.8 million South African Facebook users, which results in a 9.86% total population penetration. The South African Facebook population seems to be most concentrated in metropolitan areas, with 2 million users in Johannesburg, 860 000 in Cape Town and 840 000 in Pretoria (Vermeulen, 2012). Furthermore, the

study states that 91% of South African internet users have a Facebook account, which means that Facebook is one of the most effective ways of reaching a digital audience in South Africa (Chatterbox Digital, 2012). The Chatterbox Digital study (2012) also reveals further insights, by noting that there are approximately 1.1 million South African Twitter users that send over 470,000 tweets per month. This makes it clear that a direct and involved presence on social networking platforms could definitely translate into a substantial advantage for South African organisations (or those international entities who have South African trade interests), as Africa's lack of internet infrastructure is not applicable to South Africa itself. This fact accentuates social networking's benefit as being an excellent tool for approaching an entirely new client base, whilst simultaneously nurturing relationships with existing publics.

Many popular South African brands have nurtured a substantial subscriber base for their Facebook pages. Table 2.1 from Socialbakers.com (2012) displays the five biggest brand pages in South Africa:

Table 2.1: The biggest social networking brand pages in South Africa

Brands	Facebook users
Mxit	216 891
Woolworths	202 097
Vodacom	198 431
FNB	193 085
BlackBerry South Africa	131 231

Another interesting finding is that the average age of South African Facebook users is between 18 and 24 (Chatterbox Digital, 2012) and is 31 on Twitter, dispelling the myth that social networking is mostly only used by teens (Van Heerden, 2010:414). Carolyn Holgate (2010), General Manager of MWeb Connect, adds to these findings: "We are at the end of the early adoption phase, which was dominated by young people, and social networking is now a mainstream activity enjoyed and used by all age groups, particularly those in their thirties". This finding also strengthens the case for using social networking as a professional business tool, as it shows that social networking audience members are old enough to make serious consumer decisions, making them the perfect target public for organisational marketing and communication messages.

Taking all of the above into consideration, it should be no surprise to hear that social networking and social networking is starting to receive a considerable amount of attention in South Africa and that 67%

of local marketers plan to increase their use of blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn (Van Heerden, 2010, 414). The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2C

Social networking has gained increasing prominence during the last few years, internationally, as well as in South Africa due to the following reasons: It gives users the ability to converse both real-time and asynchronously; industry competition; strategic need to penetrate new markets and the cost-effectiveness of social networking marketing.

2.5 The influence of social networking as a professional marketing tool

Khang *et al.* (2012:281) note that social networking has led to a dramatic shift from mass communication to interactive digital communication. The scope of marketing communications has evolved and changed considerably since the recent inception of social networking as a fully-fledged professional business tool (Weber, 2009:40). Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:242) note that corporate communications has been 'democratised' – the authority of communication has been taken away from organisations and have been dispersed between each and every consumer that can create and spread content via social networking platforms as they see fit.

The power has now shifted to the digital content creator that can use social networking to spread influence across the globe (Solis, 2010:4). Berthon *et al.* (2012: 263) agree, adding that power has been shifted away from the organisation and has instead been transferred to individuals and communities. In the communication world created by social networking, consumers play an active role in communication dispersion, presenting their diverse viewpoints, generating and spreading popular ideas and influencing their peers regarding their opinions of issues and events (Khang *et al.*, 2012:281). Mangold and Faulds (2009:359) note that social networking enables consumers to converse with each other instantaneously and can be regarded as an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication.

Taking into consideration this clear shift in power, marketers should rather opt to participate, organise and encourage social networks, instead of simply pushing messaging out to audience members to interpret as they please (Weber, 2009: 4). In light of this, it can be concluded that marketers' goals have not changed, namely to attract and retain customers, however, the way in which they reach these goals has. A marketer's new role is to compile content, collaborate with your customers and engage your online communities (Weber, 2009:4). In the same way that the public had to adapt to the social networking platforms' communication rules, so too must companies and brands adapt their

communication if they wish to be effective participants (Solis, 2012:20). Marketers can now segment their messages according to interests, attitudes and behaviours, instead of demographic factors like gender and age (Weber, 2009:4). Instead of marketers researching what interest their publics have, modern consumers and active information seekers now give this information openly for marketers to utilise, which also results in them potentially being more willing to receive these information-rich messages (Solis, 2010:18).

Van Heerden (2010:415) categorises social networking marketing as an example of 'Inbound Marketing', in which the focus is on being recognised by potential customers, instead of finding new customers directly, as is the case with outbound marketing. This categorisation is an important one, as it suggests that a more indirect marketing approach is the preferred method of implementing professional social networking. Other examples of inbound marketing include blogs, e-books, YouTube videos and so forth, whilst print and TV advertisements, trade shows and email campaigns are clear examples of outbound marketing (Van Heerden, 2010:415). It is imperative for companies that partake in social networking to try to humanise themselves as far as possible, as social networking is intended for interactions between people, not companies and people (Lincoln, 2009:32). This is an essential observation, as it implies that companies need to adapt their brand personality, expectations and approach to communication on social networking platforms if they are to use it effectively to build brand loyalty and achieve other strategic objectives.

Weber (2009:4) notes that the advent of social networking has resulted in traditional marketing tools steadily losing their effectiveness. Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012:321) agree, stating that consumers are gradually turning away from traditional marketing platforms and that companies should therefore reduce their reliance on traditional marketing disciplines such as advertising. As more and more audience members become used to the new social marketing model in which they actively help to formulate the marketing message, out-dated marketing approaches are steadily losing support (Weber, 2009:5). Khang *et al.* (2012:281) support this observation, stating that the rise of social networking as a primary tool of communication has replaced the mediating function of traditional media between companies and their publics. Now, companies are required to monitor individuals' comments and thoughts regarding an organisation's products and services online 24/7, addressing and resolving crises in a timely manner (Beth, 2010).

Weber (2009:5) also notes that the way in which a marketer's success is gauged has changed dramatically: before the rise of the social web, marketing efforts were judged according to costs per thousand (CPM), in other words, how much it would cost to reach a thousand people. Today, success is determined by ROI (Return on investment), which can be a combination of different tangible and

measurable determinants (Weber, 2009:5). As final observations regarding the influence of social networking, Solis (2010:3) summarises the influence that social networking as follows:

- “Rewired the processes by which consumers share experiences, expertise and opinions.”

Social networking has partially substituted face-to-face communication, as users now share their thoughts by means of social networking platforms, and therefore have to follow the rules of those platforms they use. These rules influence the way we communicate with others. On social networks, you talk ‘with’ people and not ‘to’ people.

- “Broadened the channels available to consumers who seek information.”

The web has become a powerful information hub and with the advent of social networking platforms, this has become even more apparent. On social networks, you can ask your friends for advice or post a question directly to a company or brand’s account.

- “Remodelled the processes by which companies connect with and show appreciation for their customers.”
- “Transformed the method of influence, augmenting the ranks of traditional market experts and thought leaders with enthusiasts and innovators who self-create content-publishing platforms for their views.”

From the above discussion it becomes clear that organisations do not only need to understand the intrinsic qualities of social networking thoroughly, but also need to be willing to adapt their marketing strategy and even other elements of their business approach if they want to use social networking as a professional marketing tool at an optimal level. Marketing practitioners also need to understand the differences between the social networking platforms that they are working on, as these differences could require them to adopt their social networking strategy in order to fit both the expectation of the social networking audience members and the technical capabilities of the platform. The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2D

Social networking has enhanced the scope of marketing communications and requires marketers to take a participatory and indirect approach to their marketing initiatives. With a multitude of new platforms available for initiating conversations with brands on an intimate and equal level, customers now enjoy more power within the communication hierarchy.

2.6 The benefits of social networking as a professional marketing tool

The multitude of organisational benefits of social networking contributed greatly to the rise to thereof as a business tool. In general, online marketing is potentially more targetable (Urban *et al.*, 2009:179); allows for in-depth user insights that can be used to adapt campaigns more insightfully (Bucklin and Sismeiro, 2009:38) and also reduces staff and physical expenditure, as many of these functions are replaced by digital counterparts like online ordering systems (Avery, 1997:79). More specifically, Bhanot (2012:49) confirms that companies who invested in social networking platforms early on claim returns as high as 20 to 1, with even greater gains predicted be reaped in the future.

Different authors point out the following benefits to be gained from an active social networking presence. One of the main benefits of social networking is that social networking platforms can help businesses build relationships with new and potential clients (Fang, 2010:9), as noted in introductory comments regarding social networking in section 2.2 of this chapter. Lincoln (2009:32) adds that social networking provides organisations with the opportunity to nurture long term customer relationships, leading to higher levels of loyalty and customer satisfaction. Hoffman and Novak (2010:107), however, note that the process of nurturing meaningful relationships with customers takes time and that there are no shortcuts to achieving this. Van Heerden (2010: 414) adds that to achieve this, organisations need to continuously and actively interact, converse with and support their social networking audience members, yet cautions that social networking is far from being the panacea for building relationships between a business and its clients. If, however, used effectively in conjunction with other marketing communications efforts, it can become a successful relationship marketing tool (Van Heerden, 2010:414).

Fang (2010:5) also notes that social networking can help organisations gain prominence, with Lincoln (2009:32) adding that organisations can build a strong virtual presence that is not physically bound or limited. Weber (2009:5) notes that organisations can now potentially reach more audience members than ever before, creating new opportunities for sales lead and interest generation. Van Heerden (2012:414) explains this phenomenon by referring to social networking's capacity to allow organisations to connect customers with each other, which increases the reach and power of a social networking community beyond what would be possible on other platforms that do not encourage the sharing of content as is a typical occurrence on social networking platforms. Lipsman *et al.* (2012:40) believe that brands can benefit from the referential nature of social networking platforms, as it leads to the creation of far-reaching secondary messaging exposure to the friends and connections of their own social networking subscribers.

Fang (2012:1) notes that the referential and viral nature of social networking platforms make them especially effective as a way of reaching new clientele or as a way of re-establishing a brand presence amongst previous or existing customers. Observations made by Mathur *et al.* (2012:14) resonate with those of Fang (2012:1), stating that social networking has shown to have an impact on sales, as consumers who are subscribed to the social networking accounts of an organisation are more likely to suggest the services and products of the organisation to their friends and acquaintances and purchase those items themselves.

Van Heerden (2010:420) highlights social networking's capacity to create and manage existing brand image: "Many companies have added social networking to their marketing arsenal, as a way of increasing brand equity, brand reputation and brand image; as well as to maintain existing brand achievements and reputations." Bhanot (2012:49) agrees, stating that marketers should create social networking accounts that their consumers get excited about visiting, and in so doing, provide unlimited opportunities for brand building. Additionally, being actively present on social networking platforms also help businesses to build a sense of credibility and trust amongst their customers that expect these businesses to be actively involved on such platforms (Fang, 2012:5).

Van Heerden (2010:415) believes that in the case of many outbound marketing initiatives, targeting is done poorly, which can lead to consumers getting annoyed, as they receive unsolicited phone calls, intrusive promotions and other unwanted communications. The newly implemented South African Consumer Protection Act aims to protect consumers from unsolicited communications from companies, but this still remains a huge issue concerning outbound marketing campaigns and projects in general. Inbound marketing efforts, like social networking, on the other hand aim to create valuable and rich content that users actually want to see and look forward to contributing to in a direct manner (Van Heerden, 2010: 415). So, instead of forcing their marketing messages onto a targeted public aggressively, inbound marketing efforts attract high quality customers in a natural manner (Van Heerden, 2010:415). Fang (2012:9) agrees, stating that when compared to traditional marketing functions, like the promotion of a specific special deal, new products or price cuts, social networking platforms outshine traditional marketing, as they give marketers the ability to specify their message audience in terms of different variables that include specific interests, age groups, gender and a multitude of different options. As audience members can be highly targeted, it gives the organisation the opportunity to relay its messaging to an interested audience, resulting in targeted brand building (Weber, 2009:6) and simplifies the process of marketing messages to an accurate and relevant group that would find interest in the message, resulting in higher online marketing budgets, as marketers can rationalise and motivate their expenditure much more clearly than would otherwise be possible (Fang, 2012:5).

Van Heerden (2010:416) also discusses the complementary effect of social networking, stating that by using social networking, the content of a website can be dramatically amplified. Lincoln (2009:33) agrees, noting the power of social networking to boost traffic to other online organisational platforms such as the official company website or a company blog. When the content of a website is referred to and actively discussed by the members of social networking platforms, it gains more believability and trustworthiness, which in turn leads to more audience members being drawn to the related website (Van Heerden, 2010:416).

Another beneficial aspect of social networking that multiple authors address is that of market research. By listening to the needs and issues of customers, instead of merely broadcasting messages on social networking platforms, organisations can understand their customers much better (Van Heerden, 2012:418). Kumar and Sundaram (2012:4) note that social networking platforms offer businesses channels through which they can learn more about their customers' preferences and obtain insight with regards to the acceptance levels of their products and services. Weber (2009:39) agrees, stating that social networking can facilitate better research and development through online communities, with product improvement and innovation brought on by customer feedback and interaction. Furthermore, social networking can also be used for the purpose of new product testing and introduction – social networking platforms have been used to great success in launching new products and also test prototype (uncompleted) versions of products to a larger audience group (Van Heerden, 2012:420).

Finally, Hunt (2010:36) states that organisations that do not embrace and utilise social networking platforms' variety of recruitment possibilities could lose out on quality candidates. Lincoln (2009:33) promotes the opportunities presented by social networking for higher employee cooperation and satisfaction. Weber (2009:39) agrees, but adds that organisations can also use social networking platforms to connect with external stakeholder groups, such as existing and new or potential business partners. The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2E

Social networking bears a multitude of benefits from an organisational perspective that include: The building of relationships with new and existing clients and employees and partners; the specification of the messaging audience for highly targeted communications; the creation of rich, conversational content; targeted market research; active brand management; the support of other digital marketing mediums and so forth. communication hierarchy.

2.7 The pitfalls and disadvantages of professional social networking

Although the previous section has highlighted the magnitude of benefits of an active social networking presence for organisations, Kietzmann *et al.* (2011:242) note that many organisations are still reluctant to allocate the resources needed for the development of a strategic social networking presence. One serious issue of social networking services which contributes to this sense of organisational reluctance, is that it is still problematic to measure the actual impact and success of social networking processes for businesses, even though it is believed that online marketing budget expenditure is more effective than traditional print alternatives in general (Fang, 2010:2).

Mathur *et al.*'s. (2012:14) observations resonate with these of Fang (2010:2) and Kietzman *et al.* (2011), stating that there is a general sense of uncertainty amongst business owners regarding the overall impact that an active social networking presence will have on their organisation's sales and other success metrics. "... they don't necessarily have access to metrics and case studies at the sole proprietor, small and medium-sized businesses and enterprise levels" (Solis, 210:20). Marketing teams' expenditure on social networking initiatives come with a big risk, as many marketing campaigns have failed to achieve results, whilst others have done wonders for the company and its brands. Many social networking-driven campaigns are still being regarded as learning experiences, as they are used as a way of gauging social networking audience members' reaction to different communication and marketing strategies on these platforms (Solis,2010:20).

In light of this uncertainty regarding the measurement of social networking success and effect, Hoffman and Fodor (2010:42) propose that traditional marketing success metrics be turned on their head: "That is, instead of emphasising their own marketing investments and calculating results in terms of customer response, managers should begin by considering consumer motivations to use social networking and then measure the social networking investments customers make as they engage with marketer's brands". This suggestion therefore implies that marketers not only look at the monetary return on social networking efforts, but rather on the behaviours of their customers (customer behaviour) when calculating the success of a social networking campaign. Also suggested as way of combating the uncertainty around professional social networking, Hanna *et al.* (2011:265) propose that social networking initiatives be planned via a systematic framework that involves both digital and traditional marketing mediums.

Hall and Rosenberg (2009:10) also warn companies of the danger that social networking platforms could hold for their online reputation: "It's important to remember that customers will form and share their opinions about you and your business with or without you." Actively participating in these conversations, however, is a way of shaping your brand's reputation, helping you portray your brand or

company in a more positive light. Hall and Rosenberg (2009:110) continue, stating that even the smallest businesses (with no direct online portal of communication) should be monitoring social networking conversations about their brand.

Organisations need to realise that their consumers are talking about their brand (either negatively or positively) to other consumers, and that these conversations directly influence purchase and post purchase behaviour (Papazolomou and Melanthiou, 2012:326). Not only can this serve as a real-time benchmark of the public's opinion of your brand, it is also one of the easiest and quickest ways to solve potential problems that could evolve into complete crisis communication situations if not addressed quickly. Cambria *et al.* (2012:557) confirm the importance of in-depth opinion mining for product positioning and the distillation of other forms of knowledge gained via social networking platforms, but note that this is not a simple task. Hall and Rosenberg (2009:13) also note that it is especially crucial to gauge and monitor insights from key influencers, which include journalists, industry analysts, celebrities, politicians, bloggers, suppliers and so forth.

Furthermore, online activities like social networking should never be regarded as replacements for the relationships a company forges with families and communities and the positive physical deeds performed by a socially responsible business (Van Heerden, 2010:414). Van Heerden (2010:415) also comments on the importance of total commitment when it comes to professional social networking:

"Once the business decides to get involved in social networking, it must be fully prepared and 100% committed. If online information is not updated regularly, and if the business does not respond promptly to online queries or sends out messages that do not support the image of the business, the involvement can do more harm than good. The public are not fools and people can be sensitive and critical about poorly executed business communication. They will quickly pick up if the business is not fully committed or struggles to keep up with the typical demands of social networking users".

The most frequent reason for the failure of social networking campaigns sprouts from the business' poor judgement of the possible audience and active participants on social networking platforms (Van Heerden, 2010:416). Papazolomou and Melanthiou (2012:325) advise that firms focus their efforts on the creating and distribution of interesting content, fostering a community and engaging with their customers in a direct and personal degree.

One of the disadvantages of the world's biggest social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter is that businesses have much less control over the platform itself, its features, branding, advertisements

and the content than they would on a custom designed blog or company forum (Van Heerden, 2010:416). Whilst this lack of control might lead to a general sense of reluctance from companies to partake in popular social networking channels (due to the inherent risk to the company's reputation), the many benefits of these platforms must also be weighted in and taken into consideration before deciding not to use these channels.

Fang (2010:14) also refers to the privacy concerns that users might face on social networking platforms, stating that the ownership of information on social networking platforms become the property of the hosting site – this implies that these platforms can use this intellectual data without the permission of the company from which it originated from. Acquisti and Gross (2006:23) also note privacy concerns as a serious issue on social networking sites that need to be taken into consideration by both individuals and organisations. Businesses need to consider such privacy issues before deciding what information to post on social networking sites, as posting certain valuable info could lead to direct harm to the organisation (Fang, 2010:14).

Finally, Fang (2010:21) points out that businesses need to be aware of the following dangers when undertaking social networking initiatives for the purpose of business growth:

- **Watching for malware and spam:** whilst most social networking platforms are doing their best to prevent spam and malware applications from ruining users' experience of the platforms, the inherent viral (the online habit of sharing content with others) nature of social networking platforms makes it almost impossible to prevent unwanted messages from reaching users. Businesses must make sure that their messages never resemble, or can be mistaken for spam, as users will react negatively to such messages.
- **Being aware of customers' preferences, needs and tastes:** presenting your audience members with messages that they have no interest in, or are apprehensive towards, can lead to a tarnished image and reputation for the company. Therefore, it is vital that companies understand the expectations of their different publics before embarking on any social networking initiatives.
- **The inherent differences between various social networking platforms accentuate the need for a proper message strategy:** businesses develop strategies to build their presence on social networking websites. These tactics all aid companies in gaining prominence, improving sales and providing marketing opportunities. The guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 2F

Even though there are numerous benefits to be gained from social networking initiatives, organisations can damage their brand and reputation severely if these channels are not used soundly. Hindrances to social networking's general acceptance as a marketing tool include the fact that it is still difficult to measure the success of social networking campaigns and the necessity for a high level of organisational commitment and a highly strategic approach.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter's contextualisation has presented an analysis of the world of professional social networking with the purpose of addressing the following main research question:

RQ1.What are the characteristics, benefits and potential pitfalls of professional social networking and how did this field develop theoretically?

More specifically, the chapter firstly explored the general characteristics of social networking and social networking platforms, where it was argued that social networking functions within a modern Web 2.0 framework in which online communities share and co-create content with one another. Discussing two of the world's most prevalent social networking platforms (Facebook and Twitter) it was established that social networking channels have distinguishing characteristics in terms of functionality and possible business applications and that a thorough understanding of the impact of these differences are crucial to the optimum utilisation of social networking platforms. Looking secondly at the sudden growth and popularity of social networking platforms, it was gathered that numerous factors influenced this rise, which included industry competition, the cost-effectiveness of social networking and the need to penetrate new markets. Thirdly, the influence of social networking was explored, with the conclusion drawn that social networking has enhanced the scope of marketing communications, accentuating the need for marketers to adopt a participatory approach. Furthermore, the power of communication has shifted to the consumer, who co-creates and influences marketing messaging on a direct level. Finally, the chapter listed and discussed the benefits and potential pitfalls of social networking. The main insight gained was that, although active social networking participation can result in a variety of organisational benefits, there are potential pitfalls and disadvantages that need to be considered before a social networking strategy is planned and implemented.

With the practical field in which the study functions now contextualised, analysed and evaluated, the next chapter will discuss the study's main theoretical marketing underpinning, namely the modern movement of marketing communications. The field will be discussed with regards to its evolution from modern marketing principles, the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, as well as the considerations that need to be taken into account when planning and implementing the marketing communications mix disciplines. Throughout Chapter 3, reference will also be made to how the principles of social networking (as discussed in Chapter 2) resemble and reflect the principles of modern marketing movements such as relationship marketing and marketing communications.

CHAPTER 3

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS: THE FIVE DISCIPLINES OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS MIX AND ITS STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Introduction

With the organisational importance of social networking substantiated in Chapter 2, the main theoretical focus of the study, namely the marketing communications mix, can now be discussed in detail as a suitable tool for analysing social networking on a theoretical, as well as practical level. This will support the final theoretical argument of the study namely:

“Professional social networking should be integrated with traditional marketing efforts in order to ensure the best marketing results (Agresta & Bough, 2011:81). It therefore stands to reason that the use of a trusted marketing theory like Fill’s (2011:18) marketing communications mix, which incorporates both traditional and modern forms of marketing, will be a suitable theoretical model for the proper classification and analysis of social networking as a strategic and integrated business tool.”

The literature analysis of marketing communications and the marketing communications mix will aim to prove it to be a strategic model that incorporates a wide range of marketing disciplines and therefore, an ideal instrument by which to analyse social networking as a marketing business tool. This process will address the study’s second research question:

RQ2.“What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill’s (2006) marketing communications mix?”

Each discipline of the marketing communications mix will be discussed individually, focussing on their characteristics, examples of traditional uses, shortcomings and benefits – an example of how each tool can be used in social networking will also be discussed to illustrate their applicability and relevance to the world of social networking. Thereafter, the considerations that need to be taken into account when deciding on the exact combination and intensity of disciplines for a specific marketing application will be discussed, focussing on the effectiveness of each tool to fulfil a specific marketing objective. This theoretical discussion is a necessary step in the process of addressing all the research questions of the study.

As introduction however, the first section of this chapter will discuss the evolution of marketing theory, focussing on the most prominent developments, criticisms of traditional marketing approaches, as well as an emphasis on the general paradigm shifts that led to modern marketing movements. This background to the evolution of modern marketing theory will serve as contextualisation to the study's main theoretical marketing focus, namely marketing communications – a theory that will be shown to have its roots in the earliest approaches to organisational marketing practice. The final part of this introductory segment will illustrate how social networking is inherently suited to be analysed according to a modern marketing framework by highlighting how social networking resembles the modern marketing movement of relationship marketing. This will serve as an introduction to the study's goal of framing social networking within a modern marketing context, a process that will be initiated and explored in more detail during the preceding section focussing on the marketing communications movement.

3.2 The evolution of modern marketing practice

3.2.1 The origins of marketing theory

The concept of marketing is inherently linked to the concept of exchange – "the art of obtaining a desired product from someone by offering something in return" (Kotler, 1988:6). When people decide to satisfy their needs and wants through a process of exchange, a marketing transaction is created (Luck, 1969:54). In line with this, the American Marketing Association (1985:1) defines marketing as "The process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas goods and services to create exchange and satisfy individual and organisational objectives". For an exchange to take place, each party has to offer something that is deemed as valuable by the other party and each must be free to accept or reject the transaction (Doyle & Stern, 2006:34). With this central premise giving birth to the concept of marketing, theorists followed with more concrete definitions and descriptions of the term.

More than four centuries ago, Kotler (1972:46) defined marketing as "the disciplined task of creating and offering values to others for the purpose of achieving a desired response". Later, this definition became more distilled and targeted, with marketing being defined as "the process of all activities necessary for the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services in order to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives (Kotler, 1997).

Szmigin (2003:3) notes that the key to marketing is understanding your targeted consumer to the deepest of levels and then adapting your services and product offerings to fit those needs and desires to an optimal level. Kotler (2000:132) added another key ingredient to optimal marketing implementation

by defining the central philosophy behind marketing initiatives, namely the marketing concept: a business philosophy that holds the key to achieving organisational goals consists of the company being more effective than competitors in creating, delivering and communicating customer value to its chosen markets. Burns and Bush (2005) confirm that the definition of marketing, as defined by Kotler (1972:46) has been generally accepted as the leading accepted approach to implementing marketing initiatives, as it promotes the notion of putting the needs of the customer first – an approach that till this day is proliferated by modern movements such as ‘relationship marketing’, ‘customer-orientated marketing’ and ‘market-driven business’.

From Kotler’s (1972:46) original observations regarding marketing practice sprouted a wide variety of new perspectives and approaches to marketing. One of the most noteworthy of these evolutions is the 4 P model of marketing.

3.2.2 The 4 P model of marketing

Even though Kotler’s (1972:46) overarching philosophy towards marketing initiatives has stood the test of time, there has been a vast degree of development with regards to more specific tactics on how to approach marketing obstacles and opportunities more specifically, with numerous authors and their marketing models gaining prominence over the decades.

Frey (1961) proposed marketing initiatives be split into two discernible categories; those based on the marketing offering, and the second to those factors relating to the methods and disciplines used to market products. Other simple forms of the marketing models included product, price, place, and promotion, which came to be known as the 4 P’s of marketing (Smith & Taylor, 2004:7). This model originated in the 1960s, when Neil Borden (1964) identified twelve controllable marketing elements that could lead to marketing success if managed correctly. This model was based on an explanation of marketing practice by his associate, James Culliton (1964), in which he described the role of a marketer as a so-called ‘mixer of ingredients’. In some cases, the marketer follows the mixing recipe proposed by others, and in other cases experiments with his own concoction, or even combines different recipes to come up with a totally new approach to marketing. Jerome McCarthy (1964) condensed this model to a much simpler four element framework: Product, Price, Promotion and Place. Before long, the model became the benchmark for planning marketing initiatives, as a prevalent and indispensable aspect of marketing theory and operational marketing management (Constantinides, 2006:408).

Grönroos (1994:324) confirms that the majority of marketing practitioners adopted McCarthy’s 4 P model as the accepted archetype on how to implement transaction marketing and operational

marketing planning – several studies by different marketing theorists support Grönroos' claims that the 4 P paradigm was indeed the standard for dealing with marketing issues in a tactical approach (Sriram & Sapienza, 1991; Romano & Ratnatunga, 1995; Coviello *et al.*, 2000). Lauterborn (1990:26) went as far as to call the 4 P's of marketing the "Rosetta stone of marketing education". Because of the wide acceptance of the model amongst the marketing practitioner community, the model is also used in most modern introductory marketing textbooks (Cowell, 1984; Kotler, 2003; Brassington & Pettitt, 2003), resulting in it becoming a widespread marketing philosophy. A huge part of the model's appeal lies in its simplicity, as it is an easy concept to understand, memorise and apply to a wide range of marketing situations and scenarios (Jobber, 2001:10).

3.2.3 Criticism of the 4 P model and the rise of new marketing models

Despite all the support behind the 4 P model, several academics have expressed their doubts towards the approach, resulting in the model becoming a heavy source of controversy and scientific debate (Dixon & Blois, 1983; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1992). Certain authors go as far as to openly criticise the model, focussing on specific shortcomings of the model that bring its global marketing applicability into question:

- Internal orientation: a frequent objection underlying the mix's explicit lack of customer orientation (Kotler, 1984; Robins, 1991; Vignali & Davies, 1994; Bennett, 1997; Schultz, 2001).
- Lack of consumer interactivity: theorists argue that the mix ignores the evolving nature of the consumer who demands not only higher value but also more control on the communication and transaction process (Doyle, 1994; Yudelson, 1999).
- Lack of strategic elements: others argue that lack of strategic content is a major deficiency of the framework, making it unfit as planning instrument in an environment where external and uncontrollable factors define the firm's strategic opportunities and threats (Ohmae, 1982; Vignali & Davies, 1994).
- The 4 P model has a lack of mutual exclusiveness and collective exhaustiveness, which results in the model not being adaptable to all types of new and developing marketing movements, limiting its applicability in the ever-changing marketing landscape (Waterschoot & Van den Blute, 1992)

Even with all of the criticism from theorists, practitioners still widely accepted the model as the true benchmark for how to implement marketing principles in a planned manner (Bowman-Upton *et al.*, 1989; Sriram & Sapienza, 1991; Grönroos, 1994). Nevertheless, the criticism from theorists did take its

inventible toll on the model's widespread acceptance amongst marketing practitioners, with numerous new approaches to marketing evolving that underlined the need for a more systematic and specialised theoretical approach to marketing, criticising the 4 P model, at least in its original simplified form. Some of the most prominent movements that rose to compete with the 4P model included: strategic marketing, consumer marketing, services marketing, industrial marketing, international marketing, social marketing, retail marketing, non-profit marketing, trade marketing, relationship marketing, direct marketing, network marketing and online marketing to name but a few (Constantinides, 2006:412). Some of the additional issues with the original 4 P model highlighted by these movements included the growing pressure on marketers to better identify and satisfy constantly changing customer and industry needs; the increasing importance of services and the need to build-up long-lasting relationships with clients (Constantinides, 2006:412).

Two other prominent models arose, namely the 4 C's consumer-orientated model of marketing (Wang & Wang, 2009:18) and the 7 C's Compass model (Shimizu, 2009). Lauterborn's (1990) 4 C classification provided a more consumer-orientated approach to marketing and provided a case for niche marketing instead of mass marketing (Wang & Wang, 2009:18). Directly opposing the 4 P model, the 4 C model suggests replacing each of the 4 P elements with customer centred counterparts – 'Product' was changed to 'Consumer', 'Price' to 'Cost', 'Promotion' to 'Communication' and 'Place' to 'Convenience' (Wang & Wang, 2009:18). This model was later expanded to the 7 C's Compass, which attempts to describe the factors that play a role in the success and failure of an organisation (Shimizu, 2009).

3.2.4 Modern marketing revolutions

The most important revolutions in the evolution of marketing management theory include "the broadening of the marketing concept during the 70s, the emphasis on the exchange transaction in the 80s, the development of the relationship marketing and Total Quality Management in the 90s" (Yudelso, 1999:60). Kumar *et al.* (2000:132) note that a strategy of high risk, radical marketing innovation has been the recipe of success for many revolutionary modern global brands – they refer to these companies as adopting a philosophy of 'Market driving', in comparison to 'Market-driven' organisations that adopt a more traditional and static approach to marketing initiatives. According to Smith and Taylor (2004:4) marketing has moved from 'customer acquisition' through to 'customer retention' towards 'customer selection', wherein organisations are actively nurturing their own brand new markets by means by highly targeted and personal marketing techniques. Smith and Taylor (2004:5) also highlight the clear shift in focus and budget allocation into interactive online marketing platforms like Facebook and Twitter, the two social networking platforms (see section 2.2) from which sample data will be extracted in Chapter 5.

Mulhern (2009:2) believes that modern marketing communications has evolved, detaching itself from the following mass communication premises that governed the way marketing was implemented and planned:

- Audiences can be combined into monolithic elements with homogenous tastes (Napoli, 2003).
- Advertising can attach itself to media content and project itself onto audiences by interrupting the delivery of that content (Malthouse, *et al.*, 2007:11).
- Consumers will accept the intrusive delivery of commercial messages in exchange for free, or nearly free, content (Moorman *et al.*, 2005:55).
- Brand messages generate brand awareness and preferences that translate, loosely, into consumer spending (Tellis, 2005:168).
- Brand communications can be bundled into media plans that span multiple vehicles which constitute a relevant array of exposures to target consumers (Lee & Park, 2007:228).

The developments on the ground level of marketing practice have prompted the search for new theoretical approaches dealing with specific, rather than general, marketing problems and situations (Constantinides, 2006:411). Mulhern (2009:2) goes as far as to state that the recent changes to marketing practice, especially the large scale digitisation of media, mark a new chapter for marketing communications: “Advertising, with its well-developed business models and processes for targeting consumers with brand messages, is being reinvented for a world where demographically targeted print and broadcast messages are supplanted with data driven, contextually relevant brand communications that no longer have to be paired with news or entertainment.” Plummer *et al.* (2007) highlights the emergence of range of new online technologies and trends that have contributed to the recent paradigm shift in the world of marketing, which include online search engine, search ‘spiders’, cloud computing and algorithms that filter and serve information to a network of online communities. Furthermore, the increasingly demanding business world has put even more pressure on marketing practitioners to deliver measurable and tangible results – an issue that has been hampering the marketing industry for decades (Smith & Taylor, 2004:6).

3.2.5 Relationship marketing

This section will describe one of the previously mentioned modern marketing developments, known as relationship marketing in further detail, focussing on how it relates directly to the background of professional social networking now established. Whilst the main theoretical base of this study is the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, the broader theoretical underpinnings of relationship

marketing will first be used as an introduction in order to illustrate social networking's relevance in the field of marketing.

'Relational exchanges' (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987:12) is that leg of marketing where the purpose of the interaction is to develop long-term relationships between an organisation and its customers that lead to a higher sense of brand loyalty and the quality of interactions between these parties. Du Plessis *et al.* (2001:27) add to this definition that the focus of marketing has now shifted from a mere once-off transaction (known as transaction marketing) to the creation of an on-going relationship with customers. One of the most well-known definitions for relationship marketing, as given by Grönroos (1994:327) is "To establish, maintain and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises."

Du Plessis *et al.* (2001:259) add that relationship marketing includes using technology to assess each customer's needs on an individual level, something that would not have been possible without the use of technology, as the time and effort needed to compile such specific and personalised info manually would make it unprofitable.

Chaffey *et al.* (2009: 222) list the following advantages of online relationship marketing:

- **Targeting is more effective**, taking place via direct mails to people already enlisted on a company's social platforms.
- **Mass customisation of the marketing message**
- **Increased depth, breadth and nature of relationships with customers**
- **A learning relationship** can be achieved by using different tools throughout the customer lifecycle
- **Lower costs, as communication is always better targeted**

Little and Marandi (2003:30) add that one of the most important prerequisites of relationship marketing is the establishment of two-way dialogue between supplier and the consumer in order to identify needs and develop solutions for those needs. Relationship marketing therefore works best on platforms where the both parties seem to have an equal opportunity to engage in constant and regular two-way communication. Wolfe (1998:449) identifies three basic requirements for equal and honest dialogue:

- **Conversational reciprocity**: each party is allowed to condition its responses.

- **Reciprocal empathy:** each party reaches out and tries to understand the other party's circumstances.
- **Reciprocal vulnerability:** both sides let down their guard to some extent in order for communication flow and to build trust.

Little and Marandi (2003:72-73) state that the strength of a relationship (as established by means of relationship marketing) can be determined by means of a series of measurable variables, which include economic content, interaction level and quality, loyalty and commitment, degree of alignment and relationship history.

The inherent link between relationship marketing and social networking becomes obvious when one considers all the similarities between them, with the main connection being that both fields focus on the creation of long term mutually beneficial bonds by means of quality communication (see section 2.2). Relationship marketing's utilisation of technology to assess individual customer needs also resonates with social networking, as organisations can engage with customers on a personal level, allowing them to acquiring intimate knowledge of consumers' needs and wants (see section 2.7). The reciprocal nature of communication implemented according to a relationship marketing framework also creates a distinct parallel with social networking, seeing that the flow of messaging on social networking platforms are dually governed by both the consumer and the organisation itself (see section 2.7). As further confirmation of relationship marketing's link with social networking, Men and Tsai (2011:1) note that various companies have recognised and acknowledge social networking platforms as viable channels for the implementation of relationship marketing principles. Smith (2010:33) also advocates the connection between social networking and relationship marketing, stating that social networking platforms are widely accepted as optimum channels for online relationship building.

This substantiates that social networking has an intrinsic connection with the principles of relationship marketing – a theory believed to be the inspiration behind marketing communications (Fill, 2006), the main literary focus of this study. Furthermore, this also ascertains that social networking can be regarded as an applicable tool for the observation of the principles of relationship marketing and related theories, as applied in real-life organisational marketing scenarios. Guiding arguments derived from this section:

Guiding argument 3A

Originating from the concept of exchange, traditional marketing theory paradigms included early observations from Kotler and the 4 P model of marketing that categorised marketing efforts into four discernible and manageable elements. From criticism of this model arose a wide range of new marketing approaches and theories that included prominent modern marketing movement such as relationship marketing and marketing communications.

Guiding argument 3B

Social networking has an inherent link with the modern marketing movement of relationship marketing as both fields are ideally suited for the creation and nurturing of long term relationships with the customers of an organisation; both fields utilise technology for enhanced effect and both fields focus on reciprocal communication. The relation between social networking and modern marketing theory supports the viewpoint that social networking should be analysed and contextualised within a modern marketing framework.

3.3 Marketing communications and its strategic significance

With examples of how social networking reflects the principles of a modern marketing movement now discussed, the study's main theoretical marketing focus, namely marketing communications, can be introduced as a viable framework for the analysis of professional social networking. This section will describe the movement of marketing communications and describe the characteristics thereof to ultimately show it to be a strategically inclined marketing movement that incorporates both traditional and modern forms of marketing. This will support the final guiding argument of the study by substantiating the reasoning that marketing communications can be utilised to accurately analyse social networking's capacity as a strategic marketing tool.

One of the most prominent paradigm shifts that evolved from the criticism of the 4 P model is known as marketing communications, which focussed more directly on actual and specific forms of marketing elements or tools available to marketers for the promotion of products and services. Fill (2006) refers to

these elements or tools as marketing disciplines – for the purpose of consistency, the study will refer to these marketing elements and tools as disciplines from here on forth.

Doyle and Stern (2006:37) define marketing communications as “the process of transmitting messages with the objective of making the organisation’s products or services attractive to a target audience”. Keller (2001:823) described marketing communications as the actions that an organisation performs that represents the voice by which they nurture a dialogue with customers about their product or service offerings or other related issues. The sudden increase in the number and diversity of communication options available to marketers to reach and evoke response in consumers was one of the most crucial changes that occurred in the world of marketing that gave rise to and development of marketing communications (Keller, 2001:819).

In contrast, (Fill, 2006:9) promotes the notion that marketing communications was born from the theory of relationship marketing (discussed in more detail in Chapter 1), which itself is based on the concept of relational exchanges. Kinard and Capella (2006:365) feel that consumers perceive greater relational benefits when engaged in an exchange process or transaction with high personal contact. Fill (2011:189) calls such a transaction a relational exchange (an extension of the original exchange roots of marketing) and adds that it has the objective of creating and sustaining a long term relationship between each party. The objective of forming a long term relationship between the customer and the organisation is therefore central to the concept of marketing communications and modern marketing theory and ideology in general. Over the years, this model or framework evolved and adapted considerably, according to the ever-changing needs of the marketing profession (Smith & Taylor, 2004:7).

As noted in Chapter 1, Fill (2006:17) defines marketing communications as:

“A management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences. By understanding an audience’s communications environment, organisations seek to develop and present messages for its identified stakeholder groups, before evaluating and acting upon responses. By conveying messages that are of significant value, audiences are encouraged to offer attitudinal and behavioural responses”.

According to Fill (2006:9), the goal of marketing communications is to stimulate a dialogue that will lead to a succession of purchases, as well as a sense of complete engagement between the customer and the organisation – marketing communications is an audience-centred activity. Marketing communications is seen as a powerful marketing philosophy, as it helps marketers to create points-of-difference for product and service offerings: “In cluttered, complex marketplaces, marketing communications can allow brands to stand out and help consumers appreciate their comparative advantages.” (Keller, 2001:

823). Marketing communications addresses the issues with earlier practical theories of marketing by highlighting the importance of proper public relations and communications as an integral part of the marketing mix (Fill, 2006:19).

Many authors of marketing communications theories have also put their support behind the theoretical approach known as 'integrated marketing communications'(IMC) (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Edell, 1993; Keller, 1996; Moore & Thorson, 1996; Percy, 1997; Schultz *et al.*, 1994). Mulhern (2009:10) elaborates that IMC originated from the idea of connecting objectives and messages across numerous media vehicles, with the aim of providing a more integrated approach to marketing communications. Another important distinction of IMC (compared to traditional marketing practices) is the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the process of communication strategy and planning (Mulhern, 2009:10).

More recently, integrated marketing communications have evolved to include a substantial focus on the nurturing of close relationships with customers, making it clear that the movement is a customer-oriented management process (Kitchen *et al.*, 2004; Fill, 2006; Duncan, 2002). Even though many theorists have very particular and unique interpretations of the integrated approach to marketing communications, there does seem to be a general consensus regarding the following principles of the movement. Firstly, a multitude of communications options and marketing disciplines are employed and secondly, these communication options are designed in a way to reflect, complement and support the other communications options available. The integrated approach to marketing communications have gained a considerable amount of prominence in the last decade, but authors like Gabrielli and Balboni (2010:275) do suggest that even with this advanced evolution of the original 4 P model, there is still a observable gap between marketing theory and practice. Spotts *et al.* (1998:215) even go as far as to label this approach as a mere marketing fad.

Yet, even with the criticism of IMC, its focus on marketing strategy is paramount to this study. Schultz and Schultz (1998:18) define IMC as a "strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences." Duncan and Everett (1993:30) define the movement as being focussed on "the strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organisation to influence its perceived brand value." Taking this definition into consideration, it becomes clear that marketing communications proposes a strategic and thought-through approach to marketing initiatives. The movement acknowledges the complexity of modern day marketing initiatives and proposes that marketers focus on addressing the specific

communications needs of each of their targeted publics (Fill, 2006:20) rather than jump in with an overly broad and unspecified marketing strategy.

As Smith and Taylor (2004:10) explains, one of the most challenging obstacles that marketers face till today with regards to marketing communications is that there are no clear rules on how budget, time and resources should be spread amongst the different segments of the model – should budget simply be spread evenly between the different segments of marketing communications, or is there more that needs to be taken into consideration when compiling a proper marketing plan and strategy? Smith and Taylor (2004:10) responds by explaining that the application of marketing communications needs to be aligned with the objectives and strategic focus points of an organisation, which will help the marketer assign an accurate weight to each separate communication option of marketing communications. Fill's (2006:29) observations support this, highlighting the importance of the context of a marketing initiative or objective: marketing communications become part of the context and influences and are influenced by the particular circumstances. The key to successful marketing communications is to identify the key aspects of any situation and deliver promotional messages that complement the context.

Du Plessis *et al.* (2001:29) state that a strategy requires an organisation to manage its resources by selecting profitable markets in accordance with an ever changing market environment. A strategy is defined as “a set of decisions taken by management on how the business will allocate its resources and achieve sustainable competitive advantage in its chosen markets” (Doyle & Stern, 2006:17). Strategy therefore sets the direction of a business, providing a blueprint on how resources should be allocated and efforts managed (Doyle & Stern, 2006:17). Organisations usually adopt a hierarchical set of integrated strategies (Doyle & Stern, 2006:17), with subsidiary strategies like a marketing strategy directly originating from an overarching corporate strategy. A thought-through strategy is therefore a vital consideration in all dimensions of an organisation's functioning and should filter down and be made applicable to the marketing of products and services. According to Du Plessis *et al.* (2001:30), the main considerations of strategic marketing is the management of the markets to be served, how competition is handled and the timing of market entry and exit, it also propagates a focus on long term results.

The need for strategic alignment in marketing was in fact a prominent factor that gave rise to the development of marketing communications. Many marketers treat marketing disciplines as separate, isolated entities with their own goals and objectives, failing to recognise that the wide range of marketing disciplines should be coordinated to communicate strategically and present a consistent image to a targeted message audience (Belch and Belch, 2001). According to Fill (2006: 19), a marketing

communications strategy must be communicated in such a way that the messages are consistent (acting as positive reinforcement of the message) through time and targeted at the relevant stakeholder groups. When implemented correctly, an integrated approach to marketing communications can create a competitive advantage, boost sales and profits, as well as save valuable business time and money (Smith & Taylor, 2004:16).

The main considerations, with the intention of strategically implementing marketing communications within an organisation are (Fill, 2006:29):

- Who should receive the message?
- What should the message say?
- What image of the organisation or brand should receivers form and retain?
- How much is to be spent establishing this new image?
- How will the message be delivered?
- What actions should the receivers take?
- How will the process be controlled after implementation?
- How will results be measured and reported on?

If these questions or considerations are managed when planning a marketing initiative based on the marketing communications model, it will ensure that the marketing is both strategically focussed and results driven.

Taking the above discussion into consideration, it was decided that Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix is the most applicable and adaptable model for the analysis of professional social networking initiatives. This standpoint is based on the model's exhaustible classification of marketing functions that lends itself to the addition of social networking due to the clearly distinguishable and discernible categories (see section 3.4). Marketing communications' comprehensive approach to modern marketing qualifies the theory as the ideal tool for investigating a modern marketing tool like professional social networking – this substantiates and validates the study's final guiding argument. Guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 3C

The modern marketing communications paradigm that concentrates on a strategic and specified approach to marketing challenges evolved from more traditional models of marketing, such as the 4 P's of marketing. If a marketing communications strategy of consistent, integrated, timely and highly targeted messaging is implemented, it will lead to a competitive advantage and an increase of sales for the organisation. Such a strategy must, however, be aligned with the overarching corporate strategy of an organisation.

3.4 The five disciplines of the marketing communications mix

This section will continue the focus on marketing communications by describing the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, with the intention of addressing the first research question of the study. As introduction, different authors' observations on how to classify modern marketing initiatives into different categories will be discussed.

Whilst there is no general consensus amongst different marketing theorists on the exact labelling and categorisation of each marketing tool or discipline, most models do seem to have similar origins (namely the marketing communications paradigm) which results in them being mostly compatible and aligned with one another. Some of the disciplines available to marketers under the philosophy of marketing communications identified by Keller (2001: 821) included media advertising, direct response or interactive advertising, place advertising, trade promotions, consumer promotions and so forth. Belch and Belch (2001) propose a marketing communications mix similar to that of Fill's (2006), however, adding interactive or internet marketing as a totally separate discipline. Constantinides (2002:57) proposes a marketing model specific to a certain marketing landscape, as is the case with the 4 S (Scope, Site, Synergy and System) marketing communications mix model, specifically designed for use by online marketing specialists. Other authors such as Pickton and Broderick (2005:17) agree with the philosophy of categorising marketing initiatives into smaller, more manageable focus areas. With strategic alignment and a fully integrated approach in mind, Boone and Kurtz (2007:488) are amongst the authors who refer to the marketing communications mix as the 'promotional mix', stating that marketers use a combination of disciplines, that include advertising, publicity and so forth to generate a unified customer-centred message in order to achieve specific marketing and organisational objectives. Hughes and Fill's (2007:45) adapted version of the original marketing communications mix, known as the 'Marketing Communications Mix 2' (MCM2) originates directly from criticism of the original 4 P model of

marketing and focuses on the marketing message content and the combination of media elements used to market service and product offerings.

The disciplines and strategies that marketers use to communicate with their customers have changed dramatically since the rise of social networking as a business approach (Shankar & Hollinger, 2007; Winer, 2009). Theorists such as Hoey (1998:31) believe that the original 4 P model of marketing lends itself to a valid reinterpretation that makes it possible to include web-based marketing efforts as an integrated ingredient in the marketing communications mix. One of the most noteworthy changes in this regard is how organisations have started to look at ways of incorporating social networking initiatives into their overall marketing communications strategy (Li & Bernoff, 2008:39). Du Plessis *et al.* (2001: 260) add that by digitising the marketing communications mix, companies can combine different methods of marketing in such ways that new variations are created, thereby offering the customer more choices than ever before. It might therefore be possible to include social networking as subsidiary of more than one of these marketing channels identified or even as a stand-alone element.

Unfortunately though, academic literature has not yet caught on with the recent changes, with the result that there is little to no guidance for field marketers on how to incorporate social networking into their marketing communications strategies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009: 357; Shankar & Bantra, 2009:285). The multi-adaptability of social networking is both its greatest praise and curse, as it highlights how flexible the channel is, but also how difficult it is to determine how it fits into the organisation on a more general level and in terms of implementation within the organisation. Mangold and Faulds (2009:359) propose that social networking initiatives be included as a hybrid, integrated accompaniment to the traditional marketing communications mix, suggesting that social networking initiatives be used in combination with traditional marketing disciplines (such as personal selling and direct marketing) to achieve an organisation's marketing objectives. In agreement with this standpoint, the following section of the literature review will also include practical examples of how typical social networking functions and activities can be applied to each of the disciplines of the marketing communications mix, based on a theoretical and practical pairing methodology. Also considering Mangold and Faulds' (2009:359) standpoint that social networking be incorporated with traditional marketing initiatives, this study proposes using Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix model in order classify social networking activities within a practical marketing framework.

With the general characteristics and strategic considerations of marketing communications discussed in the previous section of this study, a specific author's take on the marketing communications paradigm as a dependable model for analysing social networking as a professional business tool will now be discussed. This will be done by undertaking an analysis of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, a

practical marketing management model that originated directly from the broader marketing communications movement. In doing so, this section will complete the first aim of the research study: “To analyse Fill’s (2006) marketing communications mix, according to the literature available on the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines.”

Throughout this section, reference will also be made of practical social networking applications of each discipline in order to promulgate the researcher’s viewpoint that the marketing communications mix can indeed be directly applied to the real world instances of professional social networking practice – these examples are extracted from the researcher’s own experience as a social networking manager for corporate brands in South Africa, such as Stuttafords, Look & Listen, Wimpy, Acer and Jaguar.

Fill (2006:24) notes that the communication mix has changed since the inception of the model: “No longer can the traditional grouping of promotional disciplines be assumed to be the most effective forms of communication.” Fill (2006) divides the disciplines available to marketers into five distinctive categories, namely advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing.

3.4.1 Advertising

Advertising is a paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, its products or services (Belch & Belch, 2001). Buil, *et al.* (2011) propagates advertising’s ability to increase brand awareness and note that it is the most visible of the five marketing disciplines. Brand-orientated advertising that does not focus on advertising price, can strengthen brand image, builds a sense of brand equity, and can also have a positive effect on sales (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Dekimpe & Hanssens, 1999). Grosskopf and Tremblay (2003:505) agree, stating that advertising can have a positive effect on sales because of its capacity to be informative and, even more importantly, persuasive, as it encourages consumers to try the product or service for its real or perceived benefits – their findings go as far as to prove that a positive relationship exists between advertising efficiency and overall firm success. Martínez *et al.* (2009:308) note that the effects of advertising depend on both the amount invested and the type of messaging that is communicated. The higher a brand’s advertising spending or budget, the higher the likelihood that its advertising initiatives will create positive brand associations in the mind of the consumer (Bravo *et al.*, 2007:188). This phenomenon can be explained by the realisation that brand associations are formed when consumer-brand contact occurs (Buil, *et al.*, 2011). Advertising can create, modify and reinforce certain associations with each new contact with the consumer (Buil, *et al.*, 2011).

In terms of the content of advertising initiatives, researchers have observed that consumers’ attitudes towards advertisements also have a direct influence on the level to which advertising influences brand

equity (Sriram *et al.*, 2007:65). A creative, innovative and original advertising campaign is much more likely to capture a consumer's attention, which in turn can lead to the creation of strong and favourable brand associations (Buil *et al.*, 2002:3). Taking the above into consideration, the frequency of exposure and the inherent quality of the advertising message itself are two of the most crucial ingredients that determine the success of advertising initiatives.

Fill's (2006) description of the advertising discipline: "A non-personal form of communication with high degree of control". Advertising's ability, however, to persuade the target audience to think or behave in a particular way is suspect. Advertising's effect on sales is also difficult to determine and these messages suffer from low credibility as audience members are less likely to believe messages delivered through advertising than they would from messages received from other disciplines in the marketing communications mix. The advantage of the advertising discipline, however, is its flexibility in the sense that it can be used to target audiences on a global, national or local level, or used to cater to a specialised group of people with specific interests or demographics. Costs per contact are low due to the large reach potential of advertising, even though initial costs can be high. The continuous and correct use of advertising, combined with the other disciplines of the marketing communications mix can be vital in creating and sustaining a specific brand personality.

Advertising is also a powerful method of developing a competitive advantage as advertising can communicate messages that frame an organisation's offering in comparison to those of others. Lastly, advertising can also serve as an anchor for integrated campaigns that span across different mediums and platforms. The main role of advertising is to build awareness, invoke engagement (at least on a cognitive level) and to position or reposition brands by changing perceptions or attitudes. Traditional platforms for advertising include: broadcast (TV & radio), print (newspapers & magazines), outdoor (billboards, street furniture & transit), new media (internet & digital devices), in-store (packaging & point of purchase) and other platforms like exhibitions, cinema and so forth (Fill, 2006).

Example of advertising in social networking: Facebook and Twitter advertising – Facebook and Twitter have tailored services especially designed for the promotion of business campaigns, with a variety of ad types, specialised targeting specifications and detailed reporting for in-depth analysis of results. These will be discussed at more length during Chapter 5.

3.4.2 Sales promotion

Sales promotion is marketing activities that provide extra value to the sale force, distributors, or the consumer and can stimulate sales (Belch and Belch, 2001). Earlier studies on sales promotion reveal that temporary price discounts have been an accepted means of inducing trial of a new or existing brand

since the 1980s (Raju, 1995:2). The reason why sales promotions that work on this basis are so effective is because trial is the first step in the consumer's adoption process; it therefore stands to reason that marketing techniques that implement this strategy have a better chance to lead to actual sales (Raju, 1995:2). According to DelVecchio *et al.* (2006:203), the main benefit of sales promotion is that it gives the consumer the power of choice, but at the same time, has the possibility of negatively affecting product preference once a sales promotion has ended. The characteristics of the sales promotion and how it is implemented will determine to what extent this negative effect can be avoided (DelVecchio *et al.*, 2006:203).

Monetary sales promotions have an inherent drawback in the sense that these are likely to have a negative influence on the perceived quality and associations of a brand due to the reduction in the internal reference price (Buil *et al.*, 2011:3). This occurs because consumers use price as an extrinsic cue to determine the quality of a product (Agarwal & Teas, 2002:213). It therefore stands to reason that price promotions should be used sparingly in order to minimise the brand quality diminishing effect thereof (Yoo *et al.*, 2000:202). Unlike monetary promotions, non-monetary promotions do not have the same diminishing effect on brand quality as consumer's internal quality reference is not affected (Campbell & Diamond, 1990:25). Seeing as non-monetary promotions focus on hedonic benefits (Chandon *et al.*, 2000:65) such as entertainment and exploration, these type of promotions have a better chance of evoking emotional responses, thus making it better inclined to promote favourable brand associations (Palazón-Vidal & Delgado-Ballester, 2005:184).

Fill's (2006) description of the sales promotion discipline: "The tactical use of different marketing techniques to increase the value and attractiveness of a specific offering". As is the case with advertising, sales promotion is a non-personal form of communication but has a greater capability to be targeted at smaller audiences. It is a highly controllable discipline that generally has lower costs tied to it than advertising. In general, its credibility is not very high and the sponsor is, or should be easily identifiable. The ability to add value and to stimulate future sales is strong. Sales promotion works on the principle of providing an incentive to encourage targeted publics to buy a product or service. The inducement is presented as an added value offering to the basic product and is intended to encourage buyers to act 'now' rather than later. Sales promotion's ability to add value to an offering is considered to be the essence thereof.

The main roles or benefits of sales promotions include the creation of short-term sales or financial results, the use of accountable and tangible marketing methods with high manager accountability, increased brand performance and brand expansion into new markets. It is important to note that sales promotions are not just limited to price deals and coupons, as there are numerous creative ways of

offering incentives to clients and potential clients. Because of this, there is a distinction between price (value-increasing promotions) and non-price (value adding promotions) sales promotions. Value increasing sales promotions include: discount pricing, money-off coupons, payment terms changes, refunds and guarantees. Value adding sales promotions include: samples, valued packaging, product trial, in-pack gifts, information (brochures, catalogues) and competitions and prize draws (Fill, 2006).

Examples of sales promotion in social networking: the interactive nature of social networking provides a magnitude of opportunities for any and all forms of sales promotions. Competitions that require input and direct participation are extremely popular on social networking platforms and one of many ways marketers are using these platforms to actively drive physical, as well as online sales.

3.4.3 Personal selling

Belch and Belch (2010) refer to personal selling as a form of person-to-person communication where a marketer attempts to persuade a consumer to purchase a product or service or to act on a promoted idea. The face-to-face nature of personal selling means that emotions can play a significant role in the selling process, to the extent that the emotional reactions to a sales interaction could affect the level of customer satisfaction during the purchase experience and influence the likelihood of future sales (Babin *et al.*, 1995:94). Verbeke and Bagozzi's (2002:233) study, for example, states that the self-conscious emotion of embarrassment could have an extremely negative effect on the sales experience: "Self- and customer-provoked embarrassment each induce distinct coping responses and both diminish adaptive resource utilisation during interactions with customers; this in turn promotes avoidance of future contact with the customer." While still lacking in relative credibility, as with advertising and sales promotion, the degree of control is also potentially lower, as a salesperson can deliver a message in an undesired manner (Lloyd & Newell, 2001:470).

Even with the added complexities of personal selling as highlighted here, many authors praise the many benefits of personal selling as a marketing tool. Goff *et al.* (1997:171), for example, note that personal selling has a unique advantage in the sense that the emotional connection and sense of initial satisfaction that a customer can gain from a personal selling experience can result in the customer overlooking certain other shortcomings of the trading process, such as technical product issues. A study by Withey and Panitz (1995:244) found that adaptive sales personnel also have the ideal opportunity to identify cues that might suggest changes in the purchase behaviour of customer groups – this implies that personal selling can be a valuable supportive tool in the process of market research. Another study by Smith *et al.* (2003) also explore the ways in which personal selling can complement other business efforts. Their conclusion was that follow-up sales efforts will generate higher sales productivity when

customers have been exposed to the organisation's product offerings at a trade show at some previous stage. This example illustrates the highly supportive capacity of personal selling as a marketing tool.

Fill's (2006) description of the personal selling discipline: personal selling is traditionally perceived as an interpersonal communication tool that involves face-to-face interactions undertaken by individuals, often representing an organisation, in order to inform, persuade or remind an individual or group to take appropriate action, as required by the sponsor. The costs of personal selling are normally high, as a considerable amount of workforce time is needed for this discipline. In an era where relationship marketing has become increasingly understood and accepted as the contemporary approach to marketing theory and practice, so does personal selling characterise the importance of strong relationships between vendor and buyer. Personal selling activities are a part of different stages in the buying process of both consumer and business-to-business markets, as messages can be adapted on the spot to fit the situations of the quick changing buying process – this makes personal selling one of the most flexible disciplines in the marketing communications mix.

As with direct marketing, personal selling is a two-way form of marketing that cannot be initiated without two or more parties' involvement. The extreme proximity needed between the parties also gives personal selling the added benefit of being a successful tool for true changes to buying behaviour and perceptions. The role of personal selling is one of representation, providing the link between the needs of their own organisation and the needs of their customers as the selling process is facilitated face-to-face. Personal selling is also crucial in the development, organisation and completion of a sale in a market exchange-based transaction (Fill, 2006).

The different types of personal selling (based on the types of customers served) are (Fill, 2006):

- Intermediaries: selling offerings to other resellers
- Industrial: business to business selling
- Professional: the advancement of ideas and offerings to influencers
- Consumer: requires contact with the end-user or retail trade channel directly

Examples of personal selling in social networking: Whilst the face-to-face nature of personal selling make it difficult to apply to the online space, the highly interactive and personal nature of social networking does make it the ideal platform for highly personal sales-related messaging, especially when it comes to personal selling targeted towards consumers. This is why a private message thread between a consumer and a business on Twitter or Facebook has become a popular way of facilitating the selling process to a personal degree. Example: user enquires about a new product offering, which results in a sales person using the opportunity to sell a new product offering to the client (acting on behalf of the

company), facilitating the specifications and delivery of the sale directly on the social networking platform itself.

3.4.4 Public relations

Doyle and Stern (2006:279) define public relations “as those activities that the organisation undertakes to communicate to its publics that are not paid for directly.” It is also known as “the art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisations’ leadership, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation’s and the public interest” (The World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, 1978). As suggested by this definition, public relations are part of the wider corporate strategy of an organisation and are a way of increasing the credibility of an organisation. Public relations implement a wide range of disciplines in order to spread messages amongst media channels in a believable way. Goldman (1984) promotes the ways in which public relations functions and activities can be used in a marketing context, stating that public relations can be utilised as a useful marketing communications discipline, providing marketing leverage that might be unattainable through other communication channels. Proactive public relations, which is more opportunity-seeking of nature, can help to publicise an organisation and in so doing, have a positive effect on the reaching of sales goals, as well as the marketing of product offerings (Goldman, 1984:64). Reactive public relations measures, however, attempt to repair an organisation’s reputation, and in so doing, prevent market erosion and minimise the level to which the drop in reputation affects company sales and general product perception (Goldman, 1984:64).

Robinson (2006:247) confirms Goldman’s (1984) much earlier observations, stating that public relations should be an important component of an organisation’s integrated marketing communications strategy, naming but a few of the modern public relations applications within a marketing context, namely: event sponsorship⁵, stunt marketing, charitable activities, and service or product placement (the paid appearance of a organisation’s products within entertainment content). Epstein (2005:26) discusses the use of charitable activities as a public relations tool and suggests that organisations look further than merely providing monetary contributions, and also encourage employee involvement in such activities –

⁵ Many marketing communication theorists such as Smith and Taylor (2002), Smith (1998), Smith and Zook (2011) position sponsorship as a completely separate element of the marketing communications mix. As propagated by Robinson (2006:247) however, sponsorship can still be regarded as a division of public relations. As further justification of this standpoint, the researcher notes that sponsorship is still widely applied as a public relations function within the marketing communications context that the researcher functions phenomenologically in himself. This standpoint of including sponsorship as division of public relations therefore ensures that the marketing communications model used in this study will not be in conflict with the study’s empirical research process.

this example illustrates but one of the complexities of modern public relations. Whilst most of these modern manifestations of public relations are more geared towards perception changes, an effective stunt marketing campaign, for example, can have a positive influence on sales product equality (Robinson, 2006:247). In general, however, the effectiveness of modern public relations activities from a marketing perspective are measured in terms 'word of mouth' measures (Dye, 2000:139) and the volume of media mentions (Robinson, 2006:248) within a certain time period. Robinson (2006:248) notes that, as a promotional tool, it can also be appropriate and possible to measure the effectiveness of public relations initiatives by means of more traditional marketing measurements, such as brand and product image.

Fill's (2006) description of the public relations discipline: charges are normally lower than with the other disciplines of the marketing communications mix, with the main costs being those of opportunity costs and the time needed to prepare press releases and related messaging. The increasing prominence of public relations in the marketing communications mix is a testimony to the tool's usefulness. Messaging transmitted via public relations channels are perceived as endorsements, and not the views of the company itself, as they are free to be changed and adapted by a more believable, objective source. This results in these messages having a higher perceived credibility than those messages transmitted through paid media, such as advertising. The drawback, however, is that there is a low amount of control in messaging, as unintended and unfavourable opinions can just as easily be communicated instead of those desired.

The main roles and benefits of public relations is heightened brand and organisational visibility, the nurturing of honest stakeholder interest, the creation of a sense of goodwill for an organisation and a strategic approach to marketing communications that adapts to changing business environments. Effective public relations is also crucial during crisis periods for an organisation, presenting a planned approach on how to deal with stakeholders in a strategic manner. Examples of public relations disciplines include: media relational disciplines (press releases, press conferences, interviews), publicity and events (product, corporate, community), lobbying and corporate advertising (combines advertising with a public relations approach, focussing on the organisation itself rather than a specific offering) (Fill, 2006).

Examples of public relations in social networking: with the wealth of information available on the internet, social networking users are accustomed to being presented with public relations inclined disciplines and messaging. Online social networking gatherings in the form of a live Facebook or Twitter discussion (question and answer session) between an audience and a brand ambassador for an organisation is one way how public relations are being incorporated on social networking platforms.

3.4.5 Direct marketing

Scovotti and Spiller (2006:199), taking into consideration all the different definitions of direct marketing via different sources, suggest the following all-encompassing definition thereof: “Direct marketing is a data-driven interactive process of directly communicating with targeted customers or prospects using any medium to obtain a measurable response or transaction via one or multiple channels.” This definition accentuates the adaptability of direct marketing and also how it focuses on measurable results, making it the ideal marketing tool when sales and returns on investments are paramount. The tradition of direct marketing originated from humble roots in the form of direct mail ordering (Scovotti & Spiller, 2006:189), but quickly grew to be one of the most successful and profitable marketing mediums in the world (Fowler 2003; Mitchell, 2003).

Thomas (2012:25) confirms the importance of direct marketing and discusses how forward thinking companies utilise direct marketing in conjunction with modern movements such as social networking to build their brand and reach new, previously distanced consumer groups. Kim *et al.* (2009:327) observe how direct marketing can be used to nurture lifetime customers, instead of once-off consumers with no brand loyalty. With all the benefits to be gained from direct marketing, Rizzo (2011:30) does warn of the multitude of common errors that marketers still to this day struggle with when it comes to the implementation of direct marketing namely “to ignore customer data such as demographics, psychographics, balance, credit score and transactions”, as well as “creating unclear and hidden messages”. Concentrating on best practice when it comes to modern direct marketing, Rizzo (2011:32) urges organisations to regard direct marketing as an on-going (quarterly, bimonthly, even monthly) marketing communications tool, instead of an once-off sales push mechanism. By taking a closer look at the data that is acquired through direct marketing initiatives, organisations can acquire crucial insights into the lifestyle and needs of their customers, making it possible to adapt messaging to suit a specific customer’s unique circumstances.

Fill’s (2006) description of the direct marketing discipline: direct marketing targets individual customers with the intention of delivering personalised messages and building a relationship with them based on how they respond to these messages. In contrast to conventional approaches, direct marketing attempts to build a one-on-one relationship, a partnership, with each customer by communicating with the customer on a direct and personal basis. Costs per contact can be high, as organisations need to adapt each individual instance of communication in order for communication to maintain its personal quality. Direct marketing is concerned with the management of customer behaviour and is used to complement the strengths and weaknesses of the other communication disciplines. It is a strategy that helps to create and sustain a personal and intermediary-free dialogue with customers and potential

customers – there must be some tangible or intangible benefits for the maintaining of this personal dialogue for the recipient. Direct marketing messaging often includes a ‘call-to-action’ element, encouraging the receiver to act or react to a message in a desired fashion. Direct marketing seeks to create a sense of trust and commitment between the organisation and its publics by means of sustaining personal and honest dialogue. It benefits from the ability to precisely target clients, which leads to a minimal amount of expenditure waste, increased profits and the opportunity to introduce established customers to related product offerings. It furthermore provides a strategic approach to marketing that seeks to eliminate channel intermediaries, reduce costs, as well improve the quality and speed of service for customers. There is no single platform or media channel that dominates direct marketing and the discipline can be approached in a variety of ways, that include the telephone, internet, press and posters. The most prominent vehicle for direct marketing messages are direct mail (personalised mail services), telemarketing, customer support centres, inserts, door-to-door marketing, print catalogues and new media channels like online customer support (Fill, 2006).

Examples of direct marketing in social networking: social networking channels provide the ideal platform for implementing a strategic direct marketing approach. Customers and potential customers have the opportunity to respond, contribute and interact on social networking page updates in a variety of ways to which companies can then personally reply to initiate a follow-up marketing message in a personalised and direct manner. For example, a user enquiring about the extension of a product warranty on the wall of a company’s Facebook page can be informed about a new product offering that might suit his needs better than the previous offering did. Guiding arguments derived from this section:

Guiding argument 3D1

The marketing communications mix can be divided into five exhaustive disciplines, namely advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing. Each of these disciplines has distinguishing characteristics which result in each having a unique set of weaknesses and strengths in a marketing context.

Guiding argument 3D2

Advertising, the most visible of the marketing communications disciplines is a non-personal, paid form of communication with a high level of control that is especially adept at increasing brand awareness, brand equity and a level of competitive advantage for organisations. It can be used to promote an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor, but its capacity to persuade consumers is, however, suspect.

Guiding argument 3D3:

As a highly controllable marketing communications discipline, sales promotion is the non-personal and tactical use of value-adding or value-increasing marketing techniques that provide the consumer with a sense of choice – monetary sales promotions can however have the negative effect of decreasing perceived product or service quality.

Guiding argument 3D4:

Personal selling is a highly interpersonal, face-to-face marketing tool that has proven to be highly effective in supporting other marketing initiatives and increasing sales, due to the emotional connection that is created, effectively changing buying behaviour and perceptions – the costs of this method are, however, high, but it also benefits from the high flexibility of message delivery.

Guiding argument 3D5:

Public relations include communication activities that provide marketing leverage, heightened organisational and brand visibility and nurture a sense of goodwill. Public relations initiatives from an external source are perceived as brand endorsements and have a positive effect on brand sentiment, nurturing honest stakeholder interest – characterised by low costs, high levels of credibility, but a low level of message control.

Guiding argument 3D6:

Direct marketing actions are personalised, data-driven, interactive marketing communications activities that promote a specific offering by means of a strong call to action, supporting the nurturing of intimate consumer relationships. It is characterised by high costs per contact, but reduces costs regarding expenditure waste as messaging is highly targeted and relevant.

Guiding argument 3E

Based on parallels in characteristics, typical social networking functions can be paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix – this solidifies the case that the marketing communications mix is an ideal framework for analysing social networking actions in more detail.

The fact that marketing communications has been shown to encompass all the different facets of marketing makes it an ideal model for the classification of different typical professional social networking actions, within the over-arching umbrella term of marketing communications. Although the marketing communications mix was not originally intended to include social networking marketing initiatives, the flexibility of the marketing communications mix (and the ever changing marketing industry in general) lends itself to an extension thereof.

Real world examples of typical social networking communication actions that fit the principles of each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix have proven this to indeed be the case. This viewpoint is further endorsed by the realisation that for social networking to be used effectively as a marketing tool, it needs to be integrated with the rest of the organisation's marketing disciplines and methods, thus implying that it can and must be analysed according to a similar and consistent model of analysis. Furthermore, the practical inclination of the marketing communications mix makes it the ideal fit for the practical approach of this study which will analyse real world social networking actions.

3.5 General and strategic considerations when implementing the marketing communications mix

The final segment of the literature study will aim to delve even deeper into the theoretical underpinnings of the marketing communications mix, focussing on the specific considerations that need to be taken into account when using the marketing communications mix to plan and strategise marketing initiatives – these considerations will be vital in the final chapter of this research study, as it will be used as the theoretical underpinnings by which guidelines will be proposed on how social networking can be implemented strategically into the modern marketing landscape. After this theoretical analysis, the research study's first research question will have been addressed.

As a critical introduction to this section, different authors' take on the key issues to be considered when planning marketing communications initiatives will be discussed. Following that, the set of considerations that will be focussed on and implemented in this study will be introduced and explained.

Two of the elements that Kim and Hyun (2011:424) proposes as key considerations for the implementation of marketing communications mix disciplines are brand equity (brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty); and market performance. Each element of the marketing communications mix has a direct, as well as indirect positive effect on the achievement of brand equity and this effect is mediated by the corporate image of the organisation (Kim & Hyun, 2011:423).

Kim and Hyun (2011:423) also highlight the importance of product complexity and product involvement and how these differences should influence the choice of marketing communications disciplines, for example: products with a low level of complexity, such as general consumables, will be best promoted

by a strong advertising campaign where brand awareness is the top objective. On the other hand, a motoring company, for example, will opt for a strategy that shifts focus to marketing disciplines that help to nurture a stronger brand image and high purchase conviction, as is the case with personal selling.

Keller (2001:826) introduces the marketing communications tetrahedron as a means of analysing the factors that influence the effectiveness of each of the disciplines of the marketing communications mix – the factors identified are those related to the consumer ('who?' and 'why?'), communication processes ('what?'), responses ('how?'), as well as situational factors ('where?'). When looked at holistically, Keller's (2001:826) marketing communications tetrahedron implies that to study the individual effects of each marketing communications discipline used in a marketing campaign, it is necessary to understand how different types of consumers, under different processing circumstances, exposed to different types of communications, respond to different brand- or communication-related tasks or measures. Keller's (2001:826) observations therefore highlight the need for a descriptive analysis (in terms of consumer response and the circumstances of communication) of each marketing communications discipline if these disciplines are to be used effectively to achieve marketing goals.

Whilst the considerations proposed above can be significant to a study of this nature, considerations proposed by Fill (2006); Doyle and Stern (2006); Kim and Hyun (2011), as well as Smith and Taylor (2004), have been selected as the main focus of this study. Fill's (2006) considerations have been chosen based on the fact that these are directly born from the marketing communications mix disciplines as proposed by Fill (2006) himself. Smith and Taylor's (2004) considerations have been included as these complement those of Fill (2006) and because these shed more light on specific strategic considerations – a crucial theme and focus point of this study. Doyle and Stern's (2006:88) focus on the objectives of a company when considering the combination of marketing disciplines also has a direct tie-in with a strategic approach to marketing.

Fill (2006:26) lists four main criteria that normally govern organisations' selection and strategic use of each of the disciplines:

- Control: advertising and sales promotion allow for a high level of message control, from design to the actual transmission, but only allow partial control over the concluding feedback associated with the original message.
- Financial resources: control is also a function of financial power. If an organisation has the financial resources to pay a third party to transmit a message on their behalf, control is lost to a certain

degree. External public relations activities are classified by a lack of control, as the message can change according to the third parties' interpretation and execution thereof.

- **Credibility:** public relations score high on credibility, as messages from public relations are perceived to be unbiased and honest. At a broad level, advertising, sales promotion, and even personal selling, can suffer from a lack of credibility.
- **Size and geographic dispersion:** a national or international consumer audience can only be reached by disciplines of mass communication, such as advertising and sales promotion. When close contact is needed for personal persuasion, personal selling would be a more effective tool to use.

Fill (2006:20) states that the marketing communications mix can be used in various combinations and varying levels of intensity in order to communicate strategically with a targeted audience. The combination of disciplines should be dependent on four key characteristics or considerations, namely the extent to which each tool is controllable, its credibility as perceived by the receiver, whether it is paid for or sponsored and whether communication takes place via mass media or a more personal approach (Fill, 2006:24). From an industry standpoint, these inherent differences in the capabilities of each tool in the marketing communications mix have led to the marketing industry becoming increasingly fragmented, with service providers (marketing agencies) opting instead to specialise in a specific tool of the marketing communications mix in an attempt to create a differential advantage above their competitors (Caemmerer, 2009:536).

Dahlen *et al.* (2010:543) point out that many agencies have responded to the call of a synergy of marketing services, offering one-stop solutions that incorporate a variety of marketing disciplines. Nevertheless, this complicates the implementation of marketing initiatives from the organisation's standpoint, as more than one marketing service provider is still usually employed for a single marketing campaign, increasing the need for team synergy, whilst also increasing marketing administration costs. Table 2.1 below classifies the key characteristics of each discipline in the marketing communications mix:

Table 3.1: the key characteristics of each discipline in the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006:24)

	Advertising	Sales promotion	Public relations	Personal selling	Direct marketing
Communications					
Ability to deliver a personal message	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Ability to reach a large audience	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium
Level of interaction	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Credibility					
Given by the target audience	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Costs					
Absolute costs	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Cost per contact	Low	Medium	Low	High	High
Wastage	High	Medium	High	Low	Low
Size of investment	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium
Control					
Ability to target particular audiences	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Management's ability to adjust the deployment of the tool as circumstances change	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High

Each discipline of the marketing communications mix has different capacities to communicate and to achieve strategic corporate and marketing objectives. If a company's objective is to increase awareness in the market, then advertising would be a suitable discipline, but if an immediate boost in sales is crucial, then a sales promotion will deliver better results (Doyle & Stern, 2006:88). For this to be possible, however, an organisation requires a thought-through corporate and marketing strategy, clearly defining and quantifying their strategic objectives (Doyle & Stern, 2006:88). These objectives need to be taken into account when proposing a guideline for how professional social networking is to be approached, based on the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix.

Doyle and Stern (2006:89) also note that the optimum combination of marketing mix discipline should also depend on the type of buying behaviour. Fill (2006:25) agrees, stating that the effectiveness of the disciplines can also be measured regarding each one's ability to influence the purchase decision process of consumers, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below:

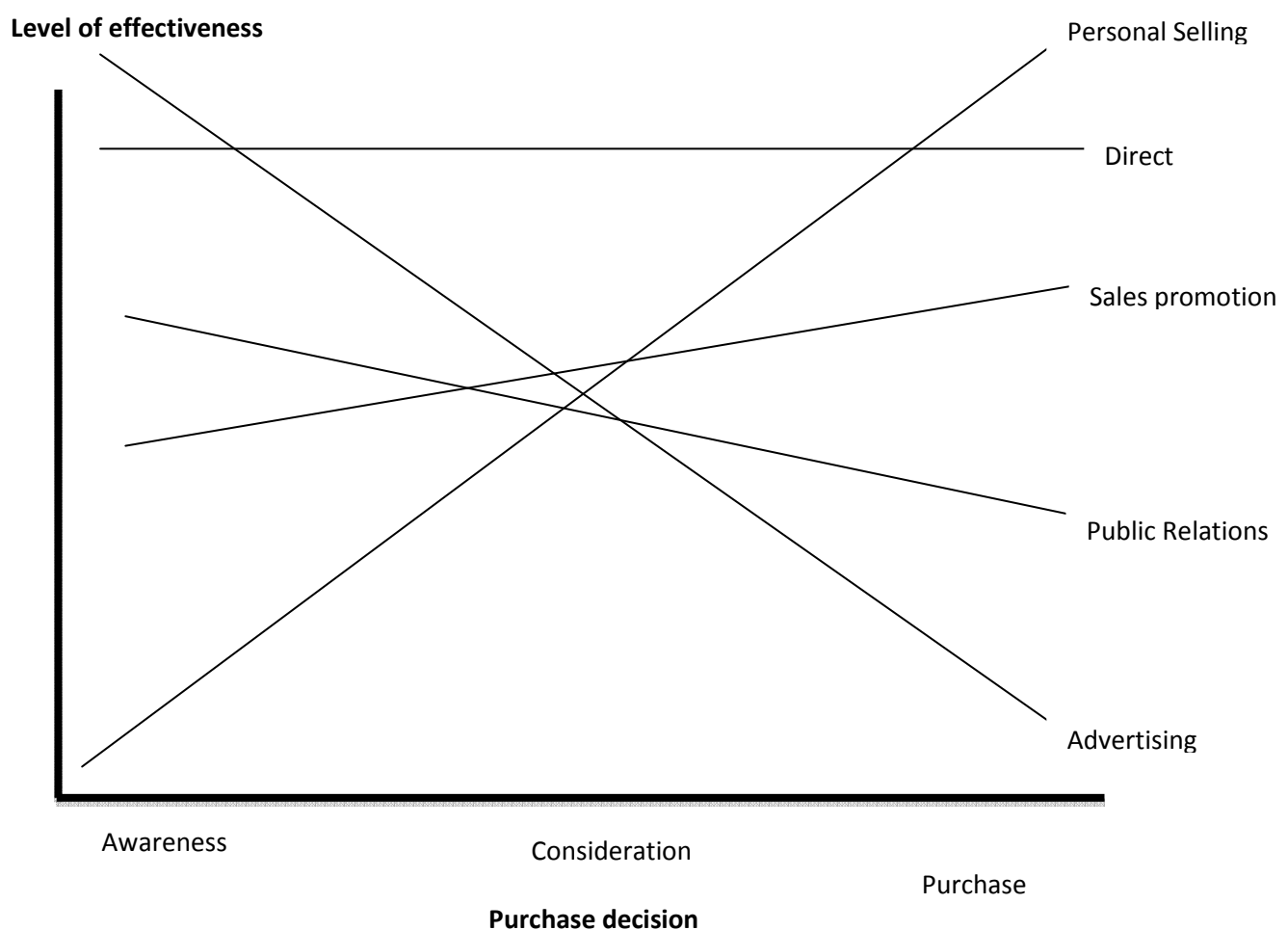


Figure 3.1: Each tool in the marketing communications' mix influence on the purchase decision process (Fill, 2006:25)

Smith and Taylor (2004:12) add to Fill's (2006) insights into each tool's influence on the buying process by adding more specific stages, focussing on the influence power of personal selling, advertising and sales promotion, as in figure 3.2 below:

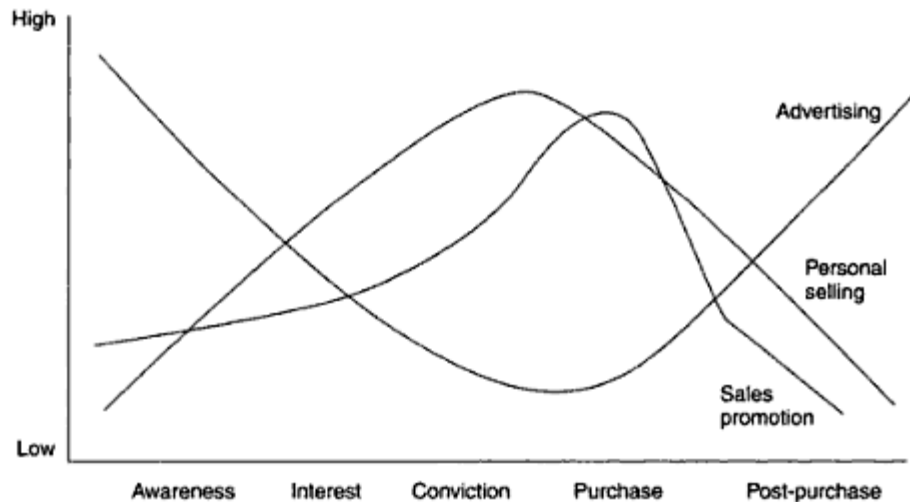


Figure 3.2: *Each discipline in the marketing communications mix's influence on the buying process* (Smith & Taylor, 2004:12)

Smith and Taylor's (2004) insights correlate with those of Fill (2006), but adds further considerations, for example that advertising is the ideal tool for creating a sense of reassurance in the product or service after purchase, increasing the chances of positive post-purchase behaviour, like repeat purchases (Smith & Taylor 2004:13). Smith and Taylor (2004:13) also mention that previous marketing opinions suggested that the optimum communications mix could be determined according to position in the market (market share), market growth and market concentration. Smith and Taylor (2004:13) believe that there are other factors that influence the choice of disciplines used, for example the difference between high-involvement (risky, expensive and requires careful analysis) purchases and low involvement (low risk, frequently bought and inexpensive) purchases. For low involvement purchases, a heavy advertising focus is needed, whilst a strategy of personal selling is more suitable for purchases of a high involvement (Smith & Taylor, 2004:13).

Another factor, according to Smith and Taylor (2004:11), that influences the choice of marketing communications mix tool is the type of product that is being offered. Kim and Hyun (2011:428) also highlight the importance of product complexity and involvement and how these differences should influence the choice of marketing communications disciplines, for example: products with a low level of complexity, such as general consumables, will be best promoted by a strong advertising campaign where brand awareness is the top objective. On the other hand, a motoring company, for example, will

opt for a strategy that shifts focus to marketing disciplines that help to nurture a stronger brand image and high purchase conviction, as is the case with personal selling. An example of this is how advertising techniques and sales promotions are more suitable for the promotion of consumer goods, whilst personal selling is the best tool for promoting industrial goods or business-to-business sales (Doyle & Stern, 2006:363) – figure 3.3 below illustrates this:

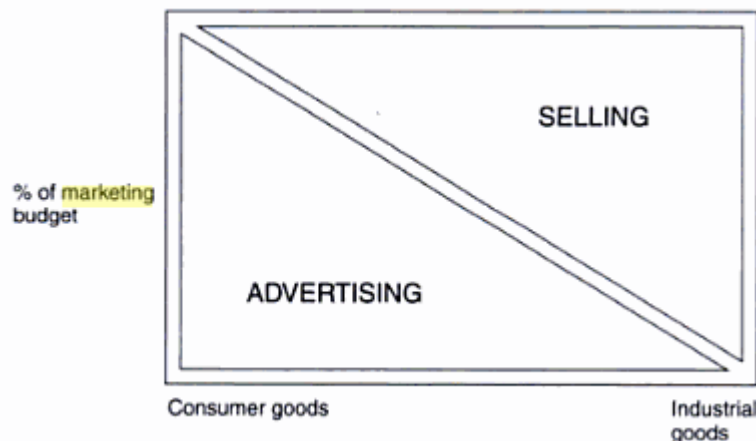


Figure 3.3: *The type of product being offered and its influence on the choice of marketing communications mix disciplines (Smith & Taylor, 2004:11)*

Lastly, from a strategic point of view, Smith and Taylor (2004:13) highlight how different marketing strategies require different blends or combinations of the disciplines in the marketing communications mix. These marketing strategies do, however, sprout from an overarching corporate strategy (as discussed earlier in this chapter) and must be aligned with this strategy in order ensure consistent messaging (Doyle & Stern, 2006:18). The choice between a push or pull marketing strategy is a major factor when it comes to the choice of marketing mix disciplines (Doyle & Stern, 2006:19). Where a push strategy serves to ‘push’ the product aggressively into the distribution channels, a pull strategy is concerned with ‘pulling’ the customer into the store and motivating them to make a purchase (Smith & Taylor, 2004:13). Push strategies need to be supported by a strong personal selling and sales promotion drive that pushes product into the market, whilst a pull strategy requires a substantial investment in advertising to entice customers to buy a product (Smith & Taylor, 2004:13).

Fill (2006:25) stresses that each discipline is part of the same set of complementary disciplines that draws on the potential of others for their own success. Once again, this observation relates back to the requirements of strategic marketing (as discussed earlier in this chapter), where an integrated approach to marketing messaging is proposed (Smith & Taylor, 2004). Keller (2001:842) agrees, adding that interactions between different marketing disciplines used in a marketing campaign can significantly affect consumers’ response to all of the other disciplines used in the campaign. Interaction between the

different disciplines of the marketing communications mix (targeted at the same market segments) also creates a sense of synergy that leads to an increase in the effectiveness of each discipline – in other words, the combined effect of the marketing communications mix is greater than the sum of its parts (Naik & Raman, 2003:375). A study by Prasad and Sethi (2009) conclude that if proper synergy is indeed achieved, it will result in an optimal marketing budget spend for all marketing communications disciplines.

This therefore implies that the effectiveness of these disciplines are dependent on a thought-through marketing strategy that combines different types and degrees of intensity of each discipline in the marketing communications mix. This all will be determined by the exact objective of a marketing plan, campaign or initiative. Smith and Taylor (2004:14) add to this by stating that each element in the marketing communications mix should be integrated with each other, as this will ensure that a unified message is consistently reinforced, another main requirement of a thought-through marketing strategy.

An example that illustrates the importance of proper integration is how sales promotion is supported by public relations awareness campaigns: without proper awareness initiatives before a sales promotion event, the sales promotion might be unsuccessful due to a lack of attendance. An example from social networking illustrates the concept of integration even further: a live chat with product endorsers on a company's Facebook page will require support in the form of platform specific advertising and pre-promotional activations on the page itself to ensure that page members attend the live chat event.

The above-discussed considerations will form the basis for the final part of the study that will propose a guideline for how social networking initiatives should be strategically planned within an organisation. Guiding argument derived from this section:

Guiding argument 3F:

The choice, combination and level of intensity of each discipline in the marketing communications mix is dependent on a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration if marketing communications are to be implemented strategically to solve or manage a marketing challenge. The most prominent of these factors identified are the key characteristics of each tool; product complexity; the influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers and the objectives of marketing initiatives. Marketing communications disciplines must be used in synergy in a marketing campaign or task in order to achieve results that are strategically aligned with the overall corporate strategy of an organisation.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the following main research question of the study was addressed:

RQ2. What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix?

To answer this research question completely, specific aspects of marketing theory was discussed, resulting in the following conclusions and insights: As introduction, the rise of modern marketing theory was discussed, focussing on the progression from traditional marketing philosophies to more modern movements. This literary exploration revealed that traditional marketing theory was born from the concept of exchange and that criticism of traditional marketing approaches such as the 4 P model of marketing led to more modern interpretations of marketing approaches, such as relationship marketing.

It was then accentuated how social networking resembles and reflects the principles of relationship marketing in order to promote the standpoint that social networking can indeed be framed within a modern marketing framework. Here, an attempt was made to establish a direct connection between the underlining principles of marketing theory and social networking itself. This was done in the hope of finding a connection that would justify the use of marketing theory to analyse social networking in more detail, ultimately proposing a more strategic approach that is in line with trusted marketing principles. It was proven that social networking indeed has an inherent connection with modern marketing movements like relationship marketing, as both fields utilise technology and a reciprocal approach to communication in order to nurture long-term relationships between an organisation and its publics.

With this link established and three of the study's main guiding arguments highlighted, the theoretical focus of the study could be addressed, namely the marketing communications mix, a theory based on the principles of relationship marketing (Fill, 2006:9). Here, the comprehensiveness of marketing communications as a way to strategically plan marketing initiatives was highlighted, substantiating its credibility as a dependable theoretical framework for this study. More importantly, it was gathered that a marketing communications messaging plan that is strategically aligned, consistent, integrated, timely and targeted could result in an organisational competitive advantage.

Thereafter, Fill's (2006) marketing communications' model for classifying marketing efforts into tangible disciplines, namely the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix was presented, showing it to be a dependable model for classifying any and all marketing efforts, which also include the focus of this study, namely professional social networking. Each discipline of the marketing communications mix was discussed separately, focussing on their characteristics, role as marketing disciplines and listing practical examples of their application – traditionally, but also as professional social networking

disciplines. Most importantly, the range of factors that can or will, determine which combination and weight must be assigned to each of the disciplines during planning and implementation was explored. Such an exploration was plausible in consideration of the fact that each discipline's unique attributes make it suitable for different marketing conditions, tasks and circumstances. This realisation is central to the study, as it provides a plan of action for how the rest of the study will take place. The above literary analysis addressed the second main research question of the study:

RQ2.“What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill’s (2006) marketing communications mix?”

The next chapter of this study will describe the research process in more detail. Here, the focus will be on an exploration of the research approach's overall philosophy and the particular research methods and how their shortcomings will be overcome. After this, the sampling and data selection for the study will be described, concluding with a section on the quality assurance measures applied to the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters' theoretical explorations contextualised the empirical segment of the study. A thorough contextualisation and understanding of the study's empirical methodologies are, however, a crucial prologue to the study's empirical data collection and analysis process.

This chapter will discuss the research methodology (as introduced in Chapter 1) chosen for this study, focussing on why the specific research methodology was chosen and how it was implemented within the context of the study. The discussion of the research method that is to follow was needed to address the final three research questions (see section 1.6.2) of this study.

Firstly, the specific research approach will be identified, concentrating on the overarching research philosophy of the study, namely qualitative phenomenology. Thereafter, the study's specific research methods, namely grounded theory and action research, will be explored, concentrating on their execution and relevance to the study at hand. The chronological ordering of the study will then be presented, followed by a discussion of the sampling source and data selection of the research. Lastly, the validity of the data and research findings will be contested, with emphasis on the inherent control checks to ensure accurate data and conclusions.

4.2 Overarching research philosophy: qualitative research

The debate about the relative worth of qualitative versus quantitative research has persisted for numerous decades (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005:177). Green and Thorgood (2004:20) note that qualitative studies seek answers to questions regarding the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of a phenomenon. Petty *et al.* (2012:270) point out that the qualitative research philosophy originates from the interpretivist paradigm, where it is assumed that people seek understanding of the world in which they live. Meaning is not automatically present in objects or social situations and it has to be created by individuals themselves (Dyson & Brown, 2006:3). Because of this assumption, the social world cannot be researched in the same way as would the natural world. True knowledge of social aspects involves deciphering and understanding the multiple views of a specific situation (Petty *et al.*, 2012:270). Within the framework of the interpretivist paradigm, researchers acknowledge that their own subjectivity influences their interpretation of events and makes this part of the research process, referred to as reflexivity (Petty *et al.*, 2012:270). Walsh and Downe (2006:115) confirm that reflexivity is a crucial part

of qualitative research and that it imbues this research approach with a distinctive sense of authenticity and honesty.

Traditional and more quantitative research approaches (in contrast to the qualitative tradition), propose “a non-biased, non-observed researcher studying objects in a controlled environment” (Dalkir, 2010:27), with the research asking questions like ‘how much?’, ‘how many?’ and ‘how often?’ (Coleman & O’Connor, 2007:655). However, the traditional stance appears too limited to investigate the use of marketing in the social networking context, due to the intrinsic complexity of organisations and the people that they engage with. The metrics that will be analysed include emotional responses, established from verbal cues of social networking audience members – merely one example of a type of variable that is commonly examined via a qualitative research approach (Gallagher & Sorensen, 2006:120). This therefore accentuates the need for a research method based on qualitative properties for this study.

Thompson and Walker (2000:66) summarise the differences between a quantitative and qualitative research approach in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: The key characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research (Thompson & Walker, 2000:66)

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Purpose	Explores causes, makes predictions.	Aims to describe phenomenon or generate theory.
Perspective	Objectivity increased through use of precise measurement.	Subjective view of participants.
Sample	Large, representative samples. Random selection of subjects or random assignment to group.	Small samples. Purposive selection of participants based on their experience.
Data	Generated from responses to questionnaires or some objective measurement	Consists of words (interviews, diaries etc.) or pictures or other artefacts of which the significance has been rendered in words.
Analysis	Statistical	Interpretive

Another distinguishing trait between quantitative research and qualitative research is that quantitative studies are normally deductive, whereas qualitative studies are usually more inductive in nature (Gallagher & Sorensen, 2006:120). Inductive research attempts to explain events and phenomenon by means of the analysis and collection of empirical data, ultimately attempting to formulate new theoretical knowledge and principles (Gallagher & Sorensen, 2006:120). Except for being inductive in nature, Blaikie (1993:131) also notes that qualitative research includes a process of abduction, where new ideas and hypotheses are generated in order to help explain phenomena within captured data. The qualitative approach is ideal for this study, as it has the purpose of establishing new theoretical standpoints that can be used to strategically guide an organisation's social networking activities.

Thompson and Walker's (2000:66) observations about the sampling size difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches (as seen in table 4.1) are also significant to the study. The researcher has access to a relatively small sample size of social networking data, which means a quantitative approach (that requires a substantial sample size) would not be an option for this study. As table 4.1 illustrates, a small sample size is more than sufficient for a qualitative research study. This once again accentuates the applicability of the qualitative research approach to the study at hand. The sampling will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Britten (2011:387) add that qualitative research is ideal in a research study where little theoretical knowledge is available on the field being studied. This accentuates the need for a model that enables the researcher to observe and analyse a new phenomenon from their own personal perspective. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is still a marginal amount and superficial level of theoretical data on professional social networking. This means that a qualitative approach will help to observe identified events, categorise these events, and ultimately analyse the relationship between them in order to generate theory where a clear lack of knowledge has been identified (Thompson and Walker, 2000:67).

Petty *et al.* (2012:271) point out that while quantitative studies carry out a process of statistical testing, and in so doing arrive at generalisations, qualitative studies, on the other hand, require descriptions that convey an exhaustive representation of opinions of the data observed. Hanson *et al.* (2011:375) note that this is one of the main advantages of the qualitative approach, as it lends itself to descriptions of complex behaviours that would not be possible with a quantitative approach, in which interpretations are always limited to the statistical evidence that the data gathered provides. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach will therefore allow the researcher to describe and contextualise the data gathered within the framework of the young and developing industry of professional social networking, attempting to contextualise and explain its finer nuances. The level to which these descriptions are thoroughly generated is, however, one of the main considerations that are focussed on

when assessing the quality and validity of qualitative research. The validity and verification of the study's data will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Hanson *et al.* (2011:375) note that another of the main benefits of the qualitative approach is the inherent flexibility thereof, as it allows for the incorporation of crucial, but unexpected events and findings. This observation is highly relevant to the study of social networking, as the ever-changing nature of the social networking industry demands a research approach that can adapt to changes immediately. Thus, qualitative research can be undertaken without the fear that new inclusions or observations will hamper the progress of the study. If, for example, a sudden functional change to the social networking platforms being analysed is implemented, the research can simply be adapted to accommodate such a change, explaining and documenting the change and its influence.

Whilst methods of synthesising qualitative research are generally less developed than those of quantitative research (Britten, 2011:384), there has been considerable growth in this regard in the last decade, with a considerable amount of competing synthesising techniques gaining prominence (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009:65). The recent progression in qualitative research methodology and its subsidiaries serves to further solidify its importance as an overarching research approach.

The above discussion has promoted the viewpoint that the qualitative research approach is a dependable approach to research in general and that the inherent characteristics of qualitative research are directly aligned and complementary to a study that focuses on the developing field of professional social networking.

4.3 Research approach: qualitative phenomenology

This section of the chapter will discuss the overarching qualitative research approach chosen for this study, namely phenomenology. Due to the researcher's direct involvement in the communication process of his client's social networking accounts (see section 1.3), it was determined that a qualitative approach of phenomenology, a well-substantiated qualitative methodology (Rapport & Wanright, 2006:229), which is inductive and descriptive (Flood, 2010:10), is the best paradigm from which to approach this study. Thompson and Walker (2000:67) identify phenomenology as a well-known and widely accepted research approach, directly linked to the qualitative research tradition.

A review of phenomenological literature accentuates the presence of a wide variety of different and rather conflicting viewpoints regarding the specifics of phenomenology (Earle, 2010:286). Because of this, Koch (1995:828) promotes the notion that a researcher has to contextualise phenomenological research in terms of the chosen philosophical tradition that informs its methods. More traditional approaches to phenomenology, propose that the research process starts free from preconceived ideas

or hypothesis, with its founder, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) defining it as (cited in Mohanty, 2008; 191) 'the science of pure consciousness'. McNamara (2005:697) defines the process of detaching or disengaging as 'phenomenological reduction'. Phenomenological reduction is achieved through a process known as bracketing, where the subject is required to set aside any preconceived notions of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Holloway, 1997; Creswell, 1998).

This study adopts the interpretivist tradition of phenomenology, which instead accepts that the researcher is unable to distance himself from his own presuppositions and should rather acknowledge these biased ideologies (Angen, 2000:386). Other prominent authors on phenomenology, such as Martin Heidegger, originally a student of Husserl (Annells, 1996:705) and Hans-Georg Gadamer also have a more modern outlook on phenomenology, rejecting the concepts of bracketing and phenomenological reduction, stating that understanding can never take place without some form of presuppositions (Moran, 2000; McConnell-Henry *et al.*, 2009). McNamara (2005:696) adds that modern phenomenology is directly critical of the notion of objectivism, as it makes the case that meaning cannot be conceived independent from the mind of the subject itself. Using this underpinning, the research follows a process of clarifying how subjective interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, instead of attempting to prevent biased interpretations in the first place. The researcher is made visible in the frame of the research as an interested and subjective actor instead of a detached impartial observer.

Gallagher and Sorensen (2006:120) refer to two different types of research introspection in order to explain the phenomenological research approach. The first type of introspection, which is known as a weaker form, is mostly used to report and study a topic that the subject is not consciously aware of (e.g. reaction times, accuracy, judgement and memory). The second, stronger or deeper form of introspection is used in an attempt to capture what a given individual is currently experiencing and is the method commonly associated with the phenomenological research process. This observation accentuates how the phenomenological research approach requires the researcher or subject to be directly involved in the research itself, and that he or she must be fully aware of the research being implemented and what it plans to accomplish.

Flood (2010:10) states that another philosophical assumption of phenomenology is that presuppositions and expert knowledge on the part of the researcher can become valuable guides during the actual research process. As is the case with this study, the researcher is fully prepared and willing to be made a direct instrument in the research process, as it is realised that this advantageous position within the framework of the study will benefit the depth of the study. As established in Chapter 1, the researcher is actively involved in the processing of formulating social networking strategies for clients, and in so

doing, also acquired knowledge regarding the strategic alignment and objectives of these clients. By therefore adopting a phenomenological approach, the researcher will be able to reference and incorporate this information directly into the study. This will add depth to the study's findings by accentuating the corporate strategy behind the social networking initiatives of the client.

Additional considerations highlighted by Gallagher and Sorensen (2006:122) include that phenomenology does not require the subject to adopt a predetermined course of action (as might be proposed by the experimenter), but to rather act as they would normally in the situation or field being researched. Moran's (2002:1) definition of the phenomenological approach infers a similar observation: "the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears". This approach prevents the possibility that the research might be biased by the experimenter's own ideals and objectives with the study, resulting in more accurate and authentic data gathering. This observation is a significant aspect for the study, as it confirms that the researcher will not have to alter his marketing communications strategy and philosophy for the purpose of being an ideal phenomenological subject in the study, as the intent of the study is to report and analyse real-life, practical implementations of professional social networking practice.

4.4 Research methods

With the methodological philosophy of the study now framed and explored, the specific types of research actions and methods that were utilised in this study will now be discussed, namely grounded theory and action research.

4.4.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory has a strong connection with the philosophy of symbolic interactionism, which itself stems from James Dewey, Cooley and Mead's pragmatist notions (Hammersley, 1989:41). Individuals are self-aware, making them capable of experiencing themselves from the perspective of others and in so doing, adapt their behaviour to fit certain situations (Mead, 1934:172). Grounded theory was however born from the 'constant comparative' method, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and places emphasis on the creation of new theory, as is the case with qualitative research methods (Coleman & O'Connor, 2007:656). The belief that knowledge can be obtained by means of generating new theories instead of analysing data from existing ones is fundamental to the principle of grounded theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004:142). Strauss and Corbin (1998) define a theory (as used in the grounded theory context) as "a set of well-developed categories (e.g. themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing or other phenomenon". This theory will be generated

in such a way that, rather than beginning with a pre-conceived notion of what the theory might suggest in mind, the theory naturally evolves during the research process being undertaken, due to a continuous system of data gathering and analysis (Goulding, 2002:299).

Since the initial founding and development of the theory, there has existed a considerable amount of separation regarding viewpoints regarding the grounded theory research approach, with its original founders, Glaser and Strauss both developing their own versions of the research methodology (Coleman & O'Connor, 2007:656). Using the grounded theory as a countermeasure to the subjectivity threat of action research is based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original theory of this methodology. The essence of the grounded theory methodology is a three-phase coding procedure that aims to increase the validity of results by analysing considerable segments of data in a thorough manner (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The steps are as follows (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998):

1. The first step in this coding process (open coding) involves identifying preliminary categories from textual data. In the context of this study, this will refer to a superficial analysis of the social networking updates extracted from the sampling source, in an attempt to identify overarching themes or categories in the data. For example, it might become apparent that most of the social networking updates made on a client's social networking profile in a certain period resemble the advertising discipline of the marketing communications mix.
2. The second step in the coding process, referred to as axial coding, involves a process of declaring relationships between the different categories identified during the first step of open coding. In the context of this study, this will require the researcher to analyse the initial groupings and categories made more descriptively in an attempt to identify inherent mutual characteristics within each type of category of social networking activity identified. For example: it might be observed that advertising centred social networking updates generate consistently high social networking community engagement levels.
3. During the final coding step, namely selective coding, the researcher attempts to group interrelated categories into theoretical models. In the context of this study, this final step will aim to compare the different categories with each other, identifying interrelated characteristics between each of the disciplines of the marketing communications mix, as well as analysing the effect that each tool has on its complementary counterparts. With the connections within and amongst the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix applied to professional social networking discussed, the researcher can then propose a new theory that can ultimately serve as a guideline on how social networking could be implemented more strategically. For example: the researcher might find that a certain balance of

advertising and promotional messaging (during a social networking campaign with the main aim of promoting a product) can increase the strategic alignment and effectiveness of the campaign.

Use of the grounded theory in this study was shown to be an effective way of confirming the research's data classification process, confirming the relevancy, accuracy and objectivity of the data. A description of the grounded theory process makes it, however, clear that this methodology could be used to not only verify the research data, but also extend the data analysis into new realms that would otherwise not have been touched upon. Seeing that the grounded theory process forces the researcher to assess and code the data according to an objective measurement or benchmark, it also resulted in a deeper and more insightful analysis thereof in general.

4.4.2 Action research

With the first research approach of the study explored, this section will describe the second research approach, namely action research. The term action research was introduced by Kurt Lewin (1946:34) and was defined as a pioneering approach toward social research which combined generation of theory with changing the social research system through the researcher acting on or in the social system. Corey (1953), as cited by Mitchell *et al.* (2009:345) defines action research broadly as a process through which practitioners study their own practice to solve problems embedded in their day-to-day practice. Baskerville (1999:7) states that the research method started gaining widespread acceptance in the 1940s and originates from the opinion that complex social phenomena can be best studied by means of introducing changes into these processes and observing what effect these planned changes have. Kock (2004:265) defines organisational action research as the process of helping the organisation overcome its daily challenges and perform stronger in specific areas, such as the marketing of products and services. When action research is implemented within an organisational context, a dual goal is formed, where the objectives are to improve the organisation chosen as subject, whilst at the same time generating academic knowledge (Kock, 2004:267). As suggested by the name, action research refers to a research method where interventions are an accepted part of the research process (Poter *et al.*, 2012:11).

The exact detailing of the action research process differs quite significantly from author to author (Dick, 2000). Many action research theorists (Kemmis, 1988; Kock, 2004; Brown & Tandon, 1983), however, agree that the process of participatory action research involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles and should be regarded as a distinguishing factor of action research.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000:276) identify the following steps in the cyclical process:

- Planning a change;
- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change;
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences;
- Replanning;
- Acting and observing again; and
- Reflecting again and restarting the process.

Susman and Evered's (1978) cyclical model of action research consists of the following five stages:

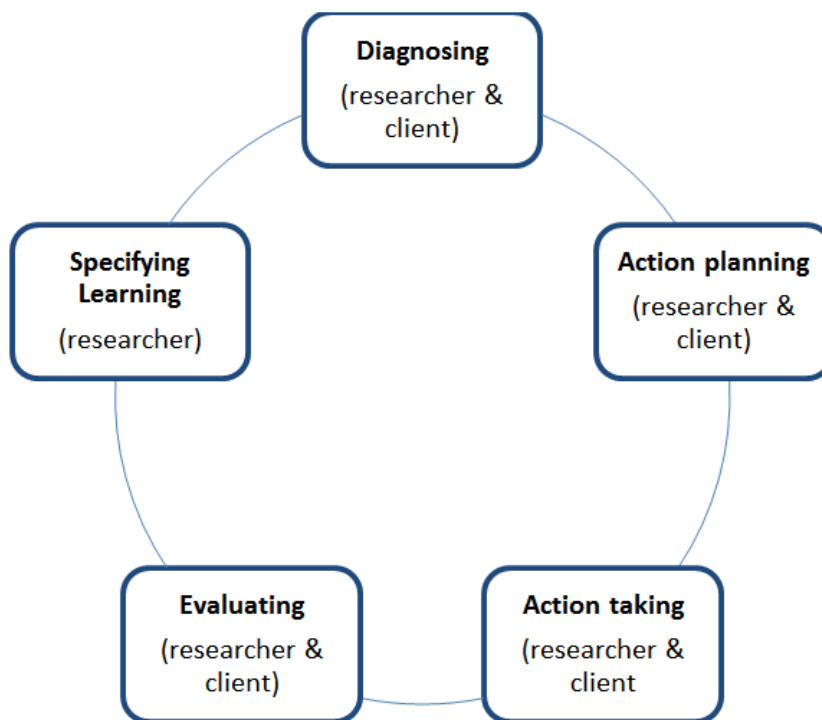


Figure 4.1: *Susman and Evered's (1978) cyclical action research order*

Each step of Susman and Evered's (1978) action research model is described in more detail below:

- Diagnosing: the researcher identifies an improvement opportunity at a prospective client organisation that is likely to lead to the development of relevant knowledge.
- Action planning: here, the researcher considers and develops an alternative course of action in order to obtain the improvement identified during the diagnosing stage.
- Action taking: now, the researcher selects and implements one of the courses of actions identified in the previous stage.
- Evaluating: the outcomes of the actions implemented are now analysed.

- Specifying learning: the outcomes of the evaluating stage is now assessed and based on the teachings from this process, a conceptual or theoretical model describing the situation under study.

Based on Susman and Evered's (1978) model, Khanlou and Peter (2005:2334) propose, instead, a more simplified explanation of the action research process: "Each circle consists of formulating a plan of action (planning), implementing the plan (action), and fact-finding about the results of the plan (evaluation) in order to concurrently solve problems and create new knowledge. Based on the evaluation, the plan is revised and a new plan is implemented, and hence another cycle begins." A process model developed by McNiff and Whitehead (2006) also reference Susman and Evered's (1978) model, but propose that action research not necessarily be regarded as a cyclical process. It proposes that the learnings gained from the process rather be used to steer the research in a new direction, instead of merely repeating the action research process itself. Kock (2004:272), however, confirms Susman and Evered's (1978) model to be the most widely accepted action research process model.

A crucial characteristic of action research is the strong role of the researcher, which is an inevitable occurrence due to the fact that by intervening in the research process, the researcher becomes a part of the study (Poter *et al.*, 2012:12). As with the interpretivist tradition of phenomenology, action research accepts the presence of the researcher's own assumptions and bias, taking an interpretative approach (Poter *et al.*, 2012:12). The process of action research provides the researcher who is involved in their own research environment (as is the case with the phenomenological approach of this study) an opportunity to utilise planned interventions in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Cronholm & Goldkuhl, 2004:2).

In the context of this study, the above mentioned planned interventions were implemented on the social networking content schedules (see section 1.8.3.2). Making these interventions a relevant part of the social networking strategy of the client ensured that the effects could be observed as examples of practical social networking implementation that related directly to the literary agenda of the study, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Some theorists (Galliers, 1992; Mumford, 2001) do, however, warn of specific threats that hamper the widespread acceptance of action research: uncontrollability, contingency and subjectivity. These threats will be discussed separately, making note of how these are to be overcome in this particular study:

1. Uncontrollability: the researcher's degree of control over the environment being studied will always be incomplete, even more so when the relationship between the organisation and the researchers

begins with no prior history (Kock, 2004:281). This threat is minimised in this particular study, due to the researcher's unique phenomenological position and extreme proximity to the research data and execution thereof, as already highlighted.

2. Contingency: the process of action research usually provides the researcher with a troublesomely large amount of data (McTaggart, 1991:169) that could be difficult to process. Furthermore, this data is normally 'shallow' and 'broad' which could make it challenging to derive cumulative data that refers to a specific effect or phenomenon (Ledford & Mohrman, 1993:169). As is the case with the uncontrollability threat, the unique position of the researcher, however, provides him with the ideal vantage point from which to prevent this possible threat from hampering the study. As previously discussed, the researcher is a professional social networking manager, with advanced experience in the process of analysing huge amounts of social networking data and converting them into smaller, discernible segments. This is a skill used on a daily basis by the researcher to provide feedback to his clients on the progress and success of their social networking initiatives. This knowledge and expertise should prove to be an indispensable advantage in the study, as it will ensure that the researcher is able to apply his research findings to practical examples from his own personal experiences as a professional social networking manager.

3. Subjectivity: the direct involvement and proximity of the researcher with the client organisations in action research studies could potentially obstruct the research process due to the inclusion of personal bias when conclusions are made, especially when a conflict of interest is observed (Francis, 1991:37). Whereas the researcher's unique position in the study can be used as a tool by which to combat the threats of uncontrollability and contingency, the same cannot be said for the issue of subjectivity, as it is in this case, the actual source from which the threat itself sprouts. Because of the researcher's extreme proximity to the research data of this study, the likelihood of the existence of conflict of interest is high. Taking into consideration the phenomenological approach of the study (as discussed previously) it is noted that a degree of personal bias is, however, openly acknowledged in qualitative studies. By being actively aware of the possibility of bias, the researcher can evaluate any presuppositions to ensure that these do not affect the objectivity of the study and therefore eliminate the possibility of subjectivity.

4.5 Research process

With each research approach now explored, the specific research steps that were followed in the empirical part of the study will now be chronologically listed and described. From the meta-theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, the researcher followed a cyclic process of describing his reality (Chapter 1). The researcher bracketed the research phenomenon (Chapter 2 and 3), in this case using

literature as a point of departure in order to identify themes according to which the research will be conducted within the delineated focus of the marketing communications mix. The theory was distilled into its core tenets, namely the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006) in order to supply themes for the research. The following guiding arguments were generated as a result of this literary exploration.

Guiding arguments derived from Chapter 2:

2A. Functioning within a Web 2.0 framework, social networking platforms and the social networking processes undertaken on them form a flexible online community, where infinite conversations centred on co-created and user-generated content take place in order to connect with like-minded individuals.

2B. Two of the world's most prevalent social networking platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter consist of distinguishing traits such as the inherent functionality of each; difference in metrics for success; the respective business applications and the level of anonymity users can maintain on these platforms.

2C. Social networking has gained increasing prominence during the last few years, internationally, as well as in South Africa due to the following reasons: it gives users the ability to converse both real-time and asynchronously; industry competition; strategic need to penetrate new markets and the cost-effectiveness of social networking marketing.

2D. Social networking has enhanced the scope of marketing communications and requires marketers to take a participatory and indirect approach to their marketing initiatives. With a multitude of new platforms available for initiating conversations with brands on an intimate and equal level, customers now enjoy more power within the communication hierarchy.

2E. Social networking bears a multitude of benefits from an organisational perspective that include the building of relationships with new and existing clients, as well as employees and partners; the specification of the messaging audience for highly targeted communications; the creation of rich, conversational content; targeted market research; active brand management; the support of other digital marketing mediums and so forth.

2F. Even though there are numerous benefits to be gained from social networking initiatives, organisations can damage their brand and reputation severely if these channels are not used soundly. Hindrances to social networking's general acceptance as marketing tool include the

fact that it is still difficult to measure the success of social networking campaigns and the necessity for a high level of organisational commitment and a highly strategic approach.

Guiding arguments derived from Chapter 3:

3A: Originating from the concept of exchange, traditional marketing theory paradigms included early observations from Kotler and the 4 P model of marketing that categorised marketing efforts into four discernible and manageable elements. From criticism of this model arose a wide range of new marketing approaches and theories that included prominent modern marketing movement such as relationship marketing and marketing communications.

3B: Social networking has an inherent link with the modern marketing movement of relationship marketing as both fields are ideally suited for the creation and nurturing of long term relationships with the customers of an organisation; both fields utilise technology for enhanced effect and both fields focus on reciprocal communication. The relation between social networking and modern marketing theory supports the viewpoint that social networking should be analysed and contextualised within a modern marketing framework.

3C: The modern marketing communications paradigm that concentrates on a strategic and specified approach to marketing challenges evolved from more traditional models of marketing, such as the 4 P's of marketing. If a marketing communications strategy of consistent, integrated, timely and highly targeted messaging is implemented, it will lead to a competitive advantage and an increase of sales for the organisation. Such a strategy must, however, be aligned with the overarching corporate strategy of an organisation.

3D1: The marketing communications mix can be divided into five exhaustive disciplines, namely advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing. Each of these disciplines has distinguishing characteristics which result in each having a unique set of weaknesses and strengths in a marketing context.

3D2: Advertising, the most visible of the marketing communications disciplines is a non-personal, paid form of communication with a high level of control that is especially adept at increasing brand awareness, brand equity and a level of competitive advantage for organisations. It can be used to promote an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor, but its capacity to persuade consumers is, however, suspect.

3D3: As a highly controllable marketing communications discipline, sales promotion is the non-personal and tactical use of value-adding or value-increasing marketing techniques that provide

the consumer with a sense of choice – monetary sales promotions can however have the negative effect of decreasing perceived product or service quality.

3D4: Personal selling is a highly interpersonal, face-to-face marketing tool that has proven to be highly effective in supporting other marketing initiatives and increasing sales, due to the emotional connection that is created, effectively changing buying behaviour and perceptions – the costs of this method are, however, high, but it also benefits from the high flexibility of message delivery.

3D5: Public relations include communication activities that provide marketing leverage, heightened organisational and brand visibility and nurture a sense of goodwill. Public relations initiatives from an external source are perceived as brand endorsements and have a positive effect on brand sentiment, nurturing honest stakeholder interest – characterised by low costs, high levels of credibility, but a low level of message control.

3D6: Direct marketing actions are personalised, data-driven, interactive marketing communications activities that promote a specific offering by means of a strong call to action, supporting the nurturing of intimate consumer relationships. It is characterised by high costs per contact, but reduces costs regarding expenditure waste as messaging is highly targeted and relevant.

3E: Based on parallels in characteristics, typical social networking functions can be paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix – this solidifies the case that the marketing communications mix is an ideal framework for analysing social networking actions in more detail.

3F: The choice, combination and level of intensity of each discipline in the marketing communications mix is dependent on a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration if marketing communications are to be implemented strategically to solve or manage a marketing challenge. The most prominent of these factors identified are the key characteristics of each tool; product complexity; the influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers and the objectives of marketing initiatives. Marketing communications disciplines must be used in synergy in a marketing campaign or task in order to achieve results that are strategically aligned with the overall corporate strategy of an organisation.

After this literary exploration, the empirical segment of the study was conducted. A process of grounded theory followed that involved applying a series of coding phases (as discussed in this chapter) to the original sampling source in order to compile a list of main and sub categories of typical social networking

actions. The research initially focussed on a single social networking campaign for a client, but later included additional campaigns to illustrate the transferability of the research findings (see section 4.8).

The grounded theory process implemented was as follows: firstly, a process of open coding was utilised in order to create a superficial list of preliminary social networking messaging categories. Secondly, axial coding was used to initiate a process of interpretation, analysing the main categories in more detail. Lastly, a process of selective coding was initiated in order to analyse the relationship between and within categories, defining deeper classifications and describing all categories identified.

Following that, each individual message was paired with one of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, proposing broad categories, relationships between different elements and finally, proposing a new theoretical framework for the application of strategic social networking. These pairings were based on the observation of theoretical and characteristic-based similarities between the social networking messaging categories identified during the grounded theory process and each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix (see section 3.4).

With the social networking actions paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, a process of action research commenced in order to assess the practical applicability of the pairings created during the grounded theory process. This final part of the research process involved applying the framework obtained via the grounded theory process to the original sampling pool, with the objective of assessing if a balance between marketing communications mix disciplines had been achieved during the campaign. It was furthermore also needed to assess if this combination was aligned with the strategic objectives of the organisation from which the social networking sampling source was extracted. Next, these suggestions were transferred and applied to a new sampling source, with the intention of showing that the framework can be utilised in order to provide suggestions on how to effectively plan and implement professional social networking activities.

Here follows a simulated breakdown of how this process took place, using the widely accepted model of Susman and Evered (1978) as framework:

- Diagnosing: firstly, the researcher analysed the current social networking communication plan and strategy of the identified social networking client, highlighting areas that could potentially benefit from a planned change. Considering the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix during this process helped to substantiate findings. For example: for a campaign that has the main objective of promoting sales, there should be a heavier emphasis on advertising and sales promotion than public relations.

- Action planning: the researcher identified a course of action needed to improve the representation of marketing communications mix disciplines in a new social networking content schedule. For example: based on these strategic objectives of the campaign, suggestions were then made regarding how to adjust the combination of message types so that these campaigns can be enhanced in terms of their strategic alignment. Ultimately, these suggestions could be used as the framework for a theoretical guideline on how to strategically implement professional social networking initiatives.
- Action taking: the plan proposed was then initiated, with the researcher observing the effect of the planned changes.
- Evaluating: the outcomes of these actions implemented were then analysed – what were the benefits and shortcomings observed from the model’s implementation?
- Specifying learning: The outcomes of the evaluating stage were assessed – considering the benefits and shortcomings of the new model, how useful is the model proposed and does it require any alterations?

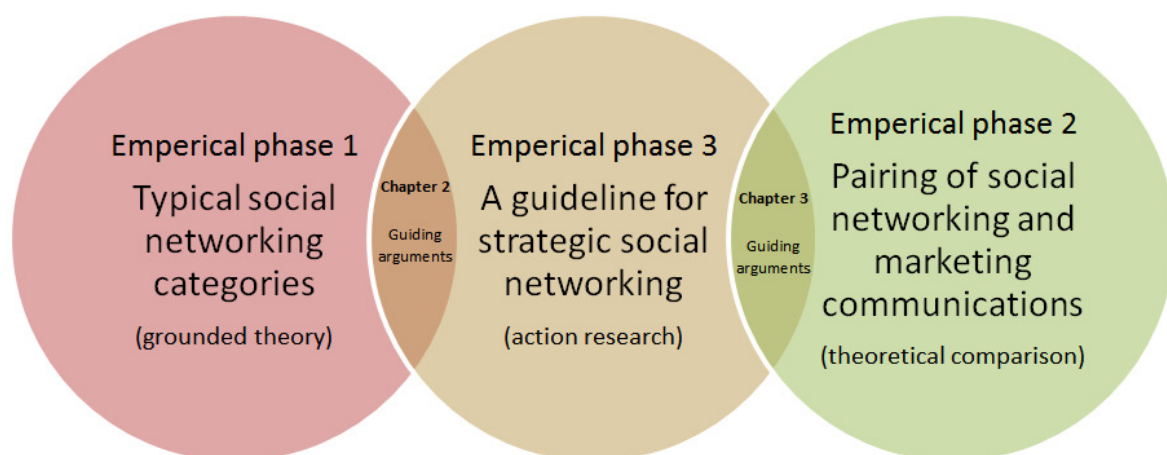


Figure 4.2: *The applicability of the study’s guiding arguments in relation to the phases of empirical research*

The figure above summarises the empirical process of the study and illustrates the applicability of the guiding arguments, in relation to each phase of the empirical research. During the first phase of the empirical process, the guiding arguments derived from Chapter 2 regarding social networking were referenced in order to validate the categorisation of typical social networking messaging. During the second phase, the guiding arguments derived from Chapter 3’s exploration of marketing communications were referenced in order to justify theoretical similarities observed between the five

disciplines of the marketing communications mix and the social networking messaging categories previously defined. During the final empirical phase, the main insights derived from Chapter 2, as well as 3 will be referenced in order to propose a strategic social networking guideline that considers both marketing communications and social networking principles.

4.6 Sampling source

As noted in Chapter 1 (see section 1.3), the social networking initiatives of Acer, a global supplier of digital device technology, was chosen as the sampling focus for this study.

4.6.1 Acer's strategic positioning

Acer develops, manufactures and sells a wide range of commercial digital equipment, which include Ultrabooks, Netbooks, smartphones, personal computers, monitors, projectors and so forth (Acer, 2012). Acer's attention, however, is on the notebook and PC market, with a substantial percentage of global market shares in these two industries (Acer, 2012). In August 2012, Acer claimed the number one position in notebook shipments worldwide for the second quarter of 2012, according to market research done by Gartner (Acer, 2012). In the EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa) region, Acer notebooks regained the number one position for market share, with 20% of total market share (Acer, 2012). The research by Gartner also revealed that Acer has a strong footing in the area of PC sales, as it ranked third worldwide in the second quarter of 2012, with 11.4% of global market shares (Acer, 2012). In light of this, Acer's global vision is to maintain and increase its position as one of the world's biggest lifestyle device providers (Acer, 2012).

Interestingly enough, this high level of market share is achieved with no form of direct sales, as Acer adopts a 100% indirect channel business model, where sales are only made via third party providers, like Incredible Connection and Dion Wired in South Africa (Acer, 2012). Because of this intensive focus on channel partners, Acer announced its partner synergy programme in May 2012, in which a differentiation between resellers is created according to performance, experience and other industry factors (Acer, 2012). This system is intended to provide enhanced support to the reseller network, whilst also motivating smaller resellers to increase their level of participation in the Acer reseller network, as this could lead to further support benefits for them (Acer, 2012).

The Acer official website places emphasis on the company's environmentally friendly approach and its biggest sponsorships: "Acer designs environmentally friendly products and has established a green supply chain through collaboration with suppliers. Acer is proud to be a Worldwide Partner of the Olympic Movement, including supporting the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Winter Games and London 2012

Olympic Games.” (Acer,2012). The digital technology context in which this organisation operates will be taken into account throughout the empirical research process, as well as in the concluding findings of the research. Brand enhancing exercises such as Acer’s active involvement with sports are part of its global strategy of “Positioning Acer as an innovative and forward-thinking leader in the technological industry as a whole” (Acer, 2012).

4.6.2 Acer’s Space Renewed Challenge’

With the main strategic imperatives of Acer discussed, the study will now present and describe the specific sampling pool of Acer marketing data that was analysed and processed during the empirical segment of this study. The main sampling source used for the purpose of this study was the communication actions implemented by Acer on the Acer Africa Facebook and Acer Africa Twitter social networking accounts. More specifically, actions performed during a specific social networking campaign time period, namely 15 March 2012 to 15 April 2012 during the Acer Africa social networking campaign entitled the Space Renewed Challenge was presented and analysed. The campaign was scrutinised with regards to the social networking strategy implemented on the Acer Africa Facebook page and Acer Africa Twitter account. Identifying a specific social networking campaign to analyse framed and contextualised the data, as the unique objectives, concept, execution and the results of the campaign could be considered when coding and categorising the data. Background of this specific campaign will now be presented.

4.6.2.1 Campaign objectives

Acer Africa required the design, development and implementation of social networking or digital customer campaign to generate on-going interest and awareness for the Acer brand and its consumer based product offering to their existing Twitter and Facebook fan base. Listed below are the campaign objectives that sprout directly from the overarching market strategy and brand strategy of Acer:

- To drive sales by creating awareness in the social space for the Acer Aspire S3 Ultrabook and other Acer devices.
- To grow an audience for Acer Africa social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter).
- To promote the partnership between Acer and Microsoft.

4.6.2.2 Platforms utilised

The campaign utilised the following Acer social networking platforms:

- Acer Africa Facebook page – competition entry platform and main competition drive. Paid Facebook advertising was also included.

- Acer Africa Twitter account – secondary promotional platform: promotional tweets and a custom designed Twitter background promoted the Facebook page competition. The design work complemented that of the Facebook page.

4.6.2.3 Campaign concept and overview

The campaign was based on a competition, whereby Acer invited current social networking fans, new fans and customers to participate in a fun Facebook campaign titled the Space Renewed Challenge. The concept utilised a fully interactive Facebook page canvas, consisting of a main landing page, four product or prize info pages and four gaming pages. The gaming concept allowed users to play for the top prize, resulting in continuous interaction with Acer via their Facebook page.

The campaign consisted of a series of digital games that each entrant needed to complete in the fastest time. This allowed them entry into the competition. The ultimate winner who cleared the challenge in the fastest time was awarded a bundled Acer product valued at R60,000 (ZAR). The grand prize as supplied by Acer included one of each of the following products: An Aspire S3 Ultrabook, an Iconia tablet w500, an Aspire all-in-one Z series and an Acer H5 series projector.

The virality (i.e. the aspect that encourages users to inform their peers of the campaign) element behind the campaign was to invite others to play the game and to come back in order to try and beat their time and that of others to be in line to win the grand prize. The Space Renewed Challenge, its content and messaging emphasised Acer's latest Aspire S3 Ultrabook product range and also covered product insights and technical abilities of each of the prizes that were given away. Being a co-funded marketing activity with Acer's business partner Microsoft, emphasis was placed on the co-branding of Microsoft's current Windows 7 Home Professional and Home Premium operating system within the campaign and its digital content. In addition to the product messaging, throughout this campaign, the Acer brand was positioned as the must have consumer electronic for home and business use.

All of the messaging and imagery were carefully crafted to immerse the players into the world of Acer. All of the games that were incorporated into the campaign were played on a virtual Acer product. This was intended to create the perception that players already have the product and are using the Acer product to perform a specific task, creating a simulation of the product in application. Each game also made use of Acer's product notes and features to further educate the player on the benefits of each Acer product represented on the page.

4.6.2.4 Design and development

Each of the canvas pages⁶ was designed to be specifically aligned with the latest Acer corporate image and branding guidelines at the time when the campaign was developed. The design elements of the competition pages allowed the integration of animation and click-through pages in a fluid web experience. Each of the four games were also developed and skinned to incorporate Acer products, imagery and an Acer ‘look and feel’.

A new Facebook canvas was designed and implemented, showcasing the competition along with a new profile image. New Acer Twitter, blog and YouTube backgrounds and images were also designed to strengthen and complement the primary messaging on the Acer Africa Facebook page. All of the canvasses and their interactivity required extensive development for the concept to work seamlessly. In addition, all four games needed to be developed according to specific technical aspects in order to work in integration to a complex timing system that allowed each entrant to record the time it takes them to complete each level of the challenge. The capturing of all entrants information and final game times were stored to a backend capture system for use in reporting and for the advanced time keeping needed for this campaign.

4.6.2.5 Campaign reporting and monitoring

It was vital that the campaign be tracked extensively during its run to assess the quality of users’ response to the campaign. This was also crucial as the information could be used to make informed changes to the campaign in order to enhance the campaign and the competition if needed. A post campaign report delivered interesting insights into the true success of the campaign and provided vital information useful for planning future campaigns.

Campaign content was included in the monthly content calendars. However, not all focus should be on the campaign. Instead, there should be a balance between engaging content, product content posts and campaign posts. This campaign messaging consisted of both written messaging, as well as visual communication by means of campaign design work.

4.6.2.6 Campaign results

The Acer Africa Facebook page likes increased by 2 724 (approximately 40% increase in total page audience size) during the campaign’s run. The total earned media (advertising equivalent) rate in Rand value of the page was calculated by looking at the number of impressions (amount of exposure)

⁶The definition of ‘Canvas pages’ and other social networking related terminology are listed in Annexure A.

received on the page during a specific time period. During the competition (15 March - 15 April 2012), 1 634 774 post impressions were received, in comparison with only 163 425 received during the entire month of February 2012. The total Earned Media Rate acquired from 15 March 2012 to 10 April 2012 is R408 693.50, compared to only R40 856. 25 from 1 February 2012 to 29 February 2012. The exponential difference between the earned media rate right before the competition started and right after it ended shows the monetary value Acer Africa received from the campaign.

The feedback with regards to the competition was positive: 177 unique players successfully completed the Space Renewed Challenge, with many users replaying the challenge more than 20 times in order to keep their spot on the leaderboard. The winning time was that of Robin Venter, with 01:07.87. In conclusion, the Space Renewed Challenge has proven to be a positive influence on the growth and engagement levels of the Acer Africa page and has been well received by Acer Africa's social networking fanbase.

This section has introduced and described the specific sampling source of the study, showing it to consist of properly considered elements and mechanics. It also showed that the Acer campaign had specific strategic intentions and objectives, aligned with the sales and brand objectives of Acer Global.

4.7 Data selection

An introductory look at the actual social networking data that was analysed during the research process of this study will now follow. Practical examples from actual social networking accounts will be provided in order to illustrate certain points and will serve as introduction to the actual analysis thereof that will take place in Chapter 5. The study centred on the content communicated on Acer's social networking accounts during the Space Renewed Challenge: a planned and strategic set of social networking messages will be transmitted or published according to a specific social networking content schedule, especially intended to communicate specific messages during the campaign time period. Below is an example of such a social networking content plan, referred to in the social networking industry as a content calendar.

Thur 8 MARCH	Thur 15 MARCH
ACER IS EASY	DIGITAL INTERVENTION
What does the tagline, 'Acer is Easy' mean to you?	It's time to reveal the prizes for our Digital Intervention challenge:
WINDOWS 7 TIPS	WINDOWS 7 TIPS
Windows 7 tip: If you restart your computer more often than you shut it down, change the default Shutdown power button to Restart.	Windows 7 tip: When you want to permanently delete a file, press Shift+Del, then Shift+Enter to confirm.
Fri 9 MARCH	Fri 16 MARCH
QUESTION	LIKE THIS POST
If you could invent any new digital device, what would you create?	Retweet this if you are proud to be a gaming nerd!
SPORT HIGHLIGHT	GEEK FACTS
Post current news story about Orlando Pirates/Springboks.	GEEK FACT OF THE DAY: The average computer user blinks 7 times a minute, less than half the normal rate of 20.

Figure 4.3: A snippet of a social networking content calendar – a planned set of content updates used on a social networking page during a specified time period.

This content was planned and formulated by the social networking strategist responsible for the account, taking direction from the requirements of the client and standard industry practice that dictates how messages should be formulated for the highest possible user engagement on content. For example, the researcher notes (as from his own experience in the industry) that message content of an open nature that encourages participation usually results in a higher level of engagement from users.

The higher the engagement from audience members on social networking accounts, the better likelihood that the account's content will be seen by social networking audience members that are not subscribed to their accounts. This is due to social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter having internal systems that automatically propagate content from accounts that have shown to resonate with subscribers of those pages amongst non-subscribers. The more users exposed to a page's messaging, the greater the likelihood that they will subscribe to the page, leading to an increase in page audience size and organic (not affected by means of paid advertising initiatives) message reach. This effectively increases the marketing value of the social networking account. Below are two examples from Acer Africa's Facebook page that illustrates the difference between high engaging and low engaging posts:

Complete the following: I love Acer because

_____.



Image 4.1: An example of an open status update that encourages user participation. Notice that 15 people liked the update and that 22 people commented on the update.

London 2012: Read about where some of our Acer-sponsored athletes will relax and connect with family and friends at Olympic Village.



Image 4.2: An example of a close-ended status update on the Acer Africa Facebook page. Note that the update only received four likes and one comment.

Whilst the main focus was on the content being communicated, other social networking initiatives and implementations (such as the visual aspect of each social networking account) were also considered as well as the reasoning behind their implementation. For example: a status update can be used to announce a product road show event (personal selling) for Acer, but this information can also be

communicated and strengthened by means of changes to the visual aspect of a Facebook page, namely the Facebook cover picture and custom canvasses.



Image 4.3: Facebook cover pic promoting Acer product road show, as an example of a visual way of communicating the personal selling discipline.

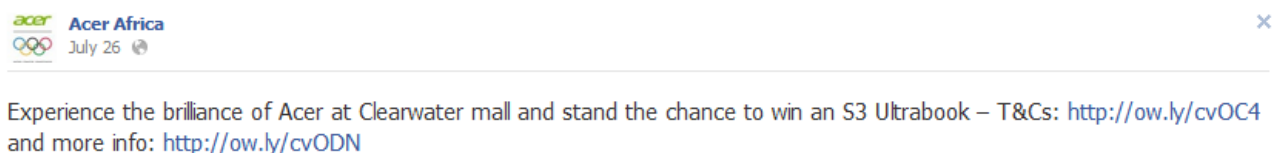


Image 4.4: A status update on the Acer Africa Facebook page, promoting the same personal selling initiative as in figure 4.6. This is an example of how different aspects of social networking communication can be used to complement and strengthen messaging.

Acer gave full permission for the use of this data and the publication thereof. This process entailed that the researcher use clear documentation of all communication activities in order to gain a better understanding of how marketing communications principles are applied in the social networking environment. The exploration of the motivations behind social networking activities referred back to the overarching organisational strategy as well the inclusive marketing strategy of the organisation itself.

The research's phenomenological approach ensured that the researcher always had access to further inspection of the context and the data when the need arose. If greater clarification was needed as to the extent of decisions or activities in the context of the campaign, the researcher was able to make use of semi-structured interviews or other research methods to gain further insight into the phenomenon. Details that could need clarification could include the need for a deeper understanding of the marketing strategy behind certain social networking activities and a better understanding of specific responses to certain planned interventions.

4.8 Research quality assurance

With the data selection of the study now fully explored and practical examples of how the extracted data was presented discussed, the final aspect of this chapter can be discussed – the metrics and criteria that were taken into consideration when assessing and assuring the quality of the research.

As is the case with quantitative research, qualitative research has theoretical measures developed in order to ensure the quality of the research undertaken (Thomson *et al.*, 2011:118). It is important to note that the ‘rules of rigour’ applicable to quantitative research needs to be adapted in order to fit the unique perspectives and methodological options of qualitative research. Unfortunately, theorists have not yet conformed to a single set of quality measures for qualitative research, which adds complexity to the process of making informed choices on which quality measures to implement and which to ignore (Rolfe, 2006:307). Some theorists, for example, are of the opinion that implementing too strict rigour and quality measures for qualitative research will inevitably stifle the level of creativity of the researcher and his or her study (Sandelowski, 1996:7).

On the other hand, certain theorists acknowledge this tension between rigour and creativity, but propagate the standpoint that some kind of validity criteria is, however, essential in preventing the researcher from coming to inaccurate and unrealistic theoretical concepts and findings (Whittemore *et al.*, 2001:526). In light of this, Rolfe (2006:311) proposes applying the term of ‘trustworthiness’ when the validity of a qualitative research is being described or assessed. Lincoln (1985) agrees, stating that the term trustworthiness encompasses aspects of ‘credibility’, ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’ and ‘conformability’ and are used to replace the terms of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity used in quantitative research studies. The main considerations of assessing the quality of qualitative research will now be discussed, with specific reference to how these will be achieved and ensured in this particular study.

- **Credibility:** aims to provide assurance that the research has obtained an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data (Whittemore *et al.*, 2001:535). Credibility in a study can be increased by a process of ‘member checking’, wherein participants confirm that the data collected represents an accurate account (Bryman, 2008:377). Clissett (2008:103) adds that credibility is also enhanced by prolonged engagement to the data being studied and persistent observation.
- **Transferability:** the extent to which the ideas and theories generated can be applied to other populations or circumstances and is also referred to as the generalisability of the findings (Bryman, 2008:378). Clissett (2008:104) states that transferability can be an issue in qualitative studies, seeing as the data pools are usually small, making it difficult to defend the findings’

transferability. A method of creating a sense of transferability in a study is to ensure that 'dense descriptions' (deep and detailed accounts) of events and ideas are described (Denzin, 1989).

- Dependability: whether the findings of the study offer a dependable and realistic interpretation of the view held by participants (Lincoln, 1985). Clissett (2008:104) adds that dependability relies on an underlying assumption that there is a tangible, static aspect to the research findings. Keeping records of key features and any changes in the research design, as well as justification of these decisions are the key to creating a sense of dependability.
- Confirmability: the degree to which the researcher is able to demonstrate that the findings relate to the data (Lincoln, 1985). A process of careful detailing is followed, by means of note collection, a research diary, extensive journaling, regular logs, and so forth to achieve this (Lincoln, 1985). Both the original data and information about the processes used to develop them should be available to outside reviewers (Guba& Lincoln, 1989).

Additionally to this criteria, Walsh and Downe (2006:116) note that the importance of reflexivity has gained increasing prominence in the field of qualitative research, as critical views on prominent qualitative studies highlighted the need for a researcher to be reflexive regarding his or her own presuppositions. In light of this, Walsh and Downe (2006:116) suggest reflexivity to be incorporated in qualitative research in the form of an additional quality assurance check, as it lends authenticity and honesty to the research data and its findings. For the purpose of this study, a process of reflexivity will entail the researcher identifying his presuppositions concerning the field of professional social networking. Seeing how the researcher himself has been working as a social networking manager and strategist, it is acknowledged that he has set ideas and opinions of the how to implement social networking strategy as well as perform and plan social networking initiatives. Listing and exploring these presuppositions and ideologies before analysing the data will help the researcher to be aware of their potential influence when interpreting the data.

Finally, Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997:741-743) propose a list of questions that a researcher can implement regarding his or her study in order to serve as a final quality control check:

- Did the paper describe an important issue addressed via a clearly formulated question?
- Was the qualitative approach appropriate?
- How were the setting subjects selected?
- What was the researcher's perspective, and has this been taken into account?
- What method did the researcher use, and are these described in enough detail?

- What methods did the researcher use to analyse the data, and what control measures were implemented?
- Are the results credible and clinically important?
- What conclusions were drawn and are they justified by the results?
- Are the findings of the study transferable to other settings?

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology of the study in detail, firstly describing the overarching research philosophy to be used, namely interpretivist phenomenology. This research philosophy was proven to be a suitable match for the study, as it confirmed and utilised the researcher as an active subject and participant in a study of which he had intimate influence on and proximity of.

In the framework of this methodological ideology, the study's two research methods were then described and analysed, focussing on how the two methods complemented each other and how each contributed to the study in a significant degree to ensure research results were objective, accurate, insightful and practical. More specifically, it was firstly shown how the research methodology of grounded theory, which consists of a series of coding phases, was used to label, describe and ultimately categorise data in discernible components in order to propose a new theoretical model. Secondly, the action research empirical process was described and detailed, demonstrating that it provided a dependable guideline from which to test the influence and applicability of a series of proposed actions.

Thereafter, the empirical research steps of the study were chronologically sketched out, showing how each step improved on the preceding step to ultimately address each of the remaining research questions and the central problem statement. The sampling focus was then introduced, contextualising the technology industry within which Acer functions. It was revealed that Acer's most imperative marketing objectives are increased sales (and maintaining their current industry position) and the positioning of Acer as an innovative and forward-thinking leader in the technological industry. The specific sampling data source, the Acer Space Renewed Challenge was also introduced and described. This exploration of the sampling source managed to contextualise the study's empirical processes. The campaign was proven to be a suitable start to Acer's active social networking participation and it was also shown that the campaign was well received by Acer's social networking subscribers and customers alike.

Finally, the aspects that needed to be taken into consideration in order to have ensured the quality of a qualitative research approach were discussed. This section revealed that qualitative studies need to be

imbued with a sense of credibility, transferability, dependability confirmability and reflexivity to ensure the quality of the study in general, as well as the quality of its methods and reasoning.

In Chapter 5, the study again shifts its attention to the addressing of the study's main research questions. Grounded theory was implemented in order to address research question 3 and 4 (see section 1.6.2). Here, the researcher aimed to identify social networking messaging categories by systematically coding the raw social networking data extracted from the study's sampling source. These categories were then consequently compared with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix in order to pair each discipline with a corresponding social networking messaging category. Afterwards (Chapter 6), a process of action research was applied in order to assess to which degree the theoretical model created during the grounded theory coding could be used to strategically plan and implement social networking messaging.

CHAPTER 5

TYPICAL AND PAIRED SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIONS DEFINED BY MEANS GROUNDED THEORY

5.1 Introduction

With a background of the industry of social networking, the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, as well as the proposed research design discussed, the study's research data could then be presented, described, categorised and analysed. In Chapter 5, the study will focus on an exploration of research question 3 and 4.⁷

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) model for the systematic process of grounded theory was implemented in order to attend to the third and fourth research questions

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data and its findings, specific references will be made throughout this chapter with regards to the measures implemented to ensure the overall quality of the research findings (see section 4.8). One of these measures that was implemented throughout the empirical process was the detailing and inclusion of descriptions of the data and the research process itself.

As introduction and contextualisation to the empirical process undertaken, the general sampling focus (Acer) as well as the specific sampling data source (The Acer Space Renewed Challenge) was described (see section 4.6). This contextualisation was crucial as it served as an objective, unbiased reference for the coding (grounded theory) and action research process that followed it.

5.2 Typical social networking communication activities defined by means of grounded theory

The first section of the empirical segment of the study attempted to compile a list of typical social networking messaging types via a process of grounded theory. More specifically, a process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding was implemented in order to draw observations, identify relationships amongst the data groups and finally propose a list of typical social networking communication activities.

This empirical process addressed the following research question:

⁷ Research question 3 and 4 will be explicitly stated in the section that each directly relates to, as to prevent any unnecessary repetition.

RQ3.What are the different communication activities typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence?

A list of all the written and visual messaging that was transmitted on the Acer Africa Facebook and Twitter accounts during the Space Renewed Challenge time period is detailed in Annexure B of this study⁸. By noting the accuracy of the data, the researcher applied a trustworthiness test of credibility to the study. Both the social networking platforms of Facebook and Twitter include comprehensive and 100% accurate online records of the messaging that was transmitted via each impersonal brand account active on such platforms, since the inception of the account itself. As the researcher was in fact the social networking manager of these accounts, he had complete administrator privilege to this data. The records are both publicly and privately available, with the administrator of the accounts, however, having easy access to deeper insights and descriptions of the messages. When collecting the data, the researcher utilised administrator privileges (see section 1.3) to ensure a comprehensive and accurate data collection process.

5.2.1 Open coding of social networking messaging

Using the grounded theory approach, general and broad observations from the sampling source were developed by means of the first phase of grounded theory, namely, open coding. Here, preliminary categories and groupings were identified from the sampling source by means of a superficial analysis of the data. Whilst a degree of interpretation was included in this section to justify and explain the broad observations, the sampling source was interpreted in more descriptive detail during the axial (see section 5.2.2) and selective coding (see section 5.2.3) process that was to follow the open coding process. The researcher minimised the interpretation process during open coding to ensure that premature interpretations made during this first process of coding does not funnel the interpretative capacity of the researcher.

In light of this, the following general observations were made during a superficial analysis of the sampling source:

⁸Updates were not transmitted over weekends and a few updates before and after the campaign were added to the list in order to illustrate pre and post campaign communications. Furthermore, the messaging excluded replies to user enquiries and other unplanned messaging content, such as page direct message replies and personal conversations with users (technical and sales queries by Acer clients). Unplanned message content is however discussed later in this chapter. A number of the written updates also included a visual (non-verbal) element as a support for the written messaging – The extent to which the visual aspects support these written aspects were discussed and touched upon in this empirical study where relevant.

Most of the written messaging centred on the promotion of the campaign: as the Facebook campaign was the driving force behind the social networking initiatives of Acer Africa during the campaign time period, it can be expected that most of the messaging revolved around the promotion of the campaign itself.

Example: *COMPETITION: Stand the chance to win a range of premium Acer products to the value of R60,000! All you have to do is get the fastest time in our 'Space Renewed Challenge' – Enter here:*⁹ (15 March 2012, Facebook)

Visual messaging focussed on products and the campaign: the visual messaging during the campaign concentrated on the aspects that directly touched upon the objectives of the campaign, namely the campaign itself and Acer product offerings.



Image 5.1: The introduction copy on the Space Renewed Challenge Facebook canvas. This visual segment explained the competition and prizes to the page members.

Example: *complete the phrase: I deserve to win the Acer Space Renewed challenge because _____.*
Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ... (27 March 2012, Twitter)

Messaging directly related to Acer, but not the campaign was included: Some of the messaging did not relate to the campaign, but did relate to Acer as a brand.

Example: *Introducing The Aspire Timeline Ultrabook M3 – available in Incredible Connection stores from today: <http://ow.ly/a181F>* (2 April 2012, Twitter)

Messaging indirectly relevant to Acer, but not the campaign was included: messaging was also added with no direct relevance to the Acer brand, but rather a more indirect relevance.

⁹ URL/Web links were omitted from the examples in an effort to minimise redundancy. The complete version of each message transmitted during the Space Renewed Challenge was however included in Annexure B of this study.

Example: *Windows 7 tip: Windows 7 now provides a standard way to switch your display from one monitor to another, or a projector – just press Win+P (4 April 2012, Twitter)*

This example resonates with the brand building and management benefit of social networking, as noted in guiding argument 2E (see section 2.6).

Messaging unrelated to Acer or the campaign was included: Communication instances were included that had direct or indirect relation to the campaign.

Example: *Any special mid-week plans for tonight? (11 April 2012, Twitter)*

Products were featured as a primary theme: There was a substantial focus on Acer products, their features and practical applications during the campaign – especially those which were a part of the campaign itself.

Example: *Have you taken a look at the prizes up for grabs in our Space Renewed Challenge? The All-in-One Z5 PC impresses with brilliant touch screen technology, modern minimalist design and turbo-charged performance – Enter here: (5 April 2012, Facebook)*

A substantial amount of the messaging was open-ended: A considerable amount of the messaging on both platforms was open-ended and encouraged interaction in the form of a response to questions directed at members of Acer Africa's social networking accounts.

The inclusion of open-ended messaging that encourages user participation echoed with the findings from the social networking theoretical exploration in Chapter 2. As noted in guiding argument 2D (see section 2.5) marketers are required to adopt a participatory approach to their marketing initiatives.

Alignment between Facebook and Twitter messaging was present: Whilst the messaging was unique between the two platforms, they were aligned and reflected each other with respect to themes, subject matter and general approach¹⁰.

Example: *The competition in our Space Renewed Challenge is really heating up – do you think you'll be able to beat the current quickest time? Enter here: (20 March 2012, Facebook) / What do you think is the secret to getting the quickest time in our digital intervention competition? Enter here... (20 March 2012, Twitter)*

¹⁰ It is noted that the decision to create a parallel between the messaging on Facebook and Twitter sprouts from the researcher's own presupposition of how to implement social networking messaging. This viewpoint sprouts from the general marketing principle of allowing different marketing platforms to support each other by means of uniform messaging.

This example illustrates that a unified approach between Facebook and Twitter messaging is indeed possible, even in light of the differences in general functionality and possible business applications, as referenced in guiding argument **2B** (see section 2.3).

This concludes the preliminary analysis of the sampling source by means of a superficial process of open coding. In summary, this coding process highlighted the opinion that a considerable amount of messaging focussed exclusively on the Space Renewed Challenge itself, but that there was also some messaging that centred on the organisation and its products. Messaging was also transmitted that seemed to have no connection with the campaign or Acer and many of the messages adopted an open-ended structure.

5.2.2 Axial coding of social networking messaging

With preliminary social networking messaging categories broadly identified, the succeeding coding phase aimed to sub-categorise these broad categories into more specific and descriptive groupings. This was done via the second phase of grounded theory, known as axial coding (i.e. declaring relationships within the broad categories). Here, the broader observations listed during the open coding process were interpreted more descriptively in order to identify distinguishing relational characteristics within the broader categories. In so doing, informal groupings of message types were identified –descriptions were included in order to increase the general trustworthiness of the study. The following message groupings were identified:

Campaign administration messaging: messaging was included that primarily focussed on relaying the progress and development of the campaign. These messages had a secondary emphasis on promoting the campaign, but the primary focus remained on administrative cues.

Example: One day into the competition and our Space Renewed Challenge has already started to heat up! Currently, Shelby Green is leading the pack with an amazing time of '01:54:32' – do you think you can beat her? (15 March 2012, Facebook)

Pre and post campaign related messaging: messaging was included that promoted the campaign before it was launched, as well as content focussed on the campaign after it ended.

Example: Our next major Facebook competition is just around the corner and it promises to be the best and most fun thing we've ever done on social networking – more info to follow soon... (13 March 2012, Facebook)

Varied degree of emphasis in campaign related messaging: whilst some campaign related messaging focussed directly on the promotion of the competition itself, other updates focussed the user's attention on secondary elements of the campaign, for example, the featured Acer products.

Ensuring that not all of the campaign updates directly promoted the competition helped to achieve balance on the page. The importance of an indirect approach to messaging was also noted in guiding argument **2D** (see section 2.5).

Example: *What prize in the Space Renewed Challenge are you most excited for? The All-in-one PC, Projector, Tablet or Ultrabook? (28 March 2012, Twitter)*

Messaging that promoted product sales and prices: whilst some updates only communicated product features and descriptions of products, other updates included direct reference to product sales deals.

Example: *Check out these great deals on Acer products from the following retail outlets – where do you prefer to buy Acer products? (4 April 2012, Twitter)*

The presence of messaging directly focussed on sales promotion supported the findings of Chapter 2, as stipulated in guiding argument **2C** (see section 2.4) that notes that the need to permeate new markets was one of the factors that attributed to the rise of social networking .

Messaging that promoted Acer partnerships: messaging such as the series of 'Windows 7' tips were included in order to subtly highlight Acer's partnership with Microsoft. Microsoft was also a co-sponsor of the campaign, so including messages related to their product offerings was a requirement of the funding arrangement.

Example: *Windows 7 tip: Press Windows and T, and you move the focus to the left-most icon on the taskbar. Then use your arrow keys to change the focus to other icons, and you get a live preview of every window. (17 April 2012, Facebook)*

As noted in guiding argument **2E** (see section 2.6), social networking allows organisations to nurture relationships with their industry partners. The above example accentuated this point.

Messaging that promoted Acer sponsorships: Acer's commitment to sport was reflected in updates about the Orlando Pirates football team, one of South Africa's sports team and an update regarding the 2012 Olympic Games, which Acer officially sponsors.

Example: *Big up to the Orlando Pirates who defeated the Free State Stars with a convincing score of 3-1 last night! Acer Africa is a proud sponsor of the Orlando Pirates Football Club.(19 March 2012, Facebook)*

Messaging that educated users about the Acer brand: public relations related copy was added that educated users on the Acer brand itself and not on its specific properties.

Example: *An informative article on Acer Africa's vision: "We have a very clear road-map on tablets going forward and will have a strong range offer on Android and Windows 8." (3 April 2012, Facebook)*

This example illustrated the brand building capacity of social networking, as listed in guiding argument **2E** (see section 2.6).

Messaging that pushed other Acer promotional initiatives: content was also added with the intention of promoting other marketing initiatives of Acer.

Example: *Here's our latest radio ad – have you heard it on the radio yet? Click here to enter our Space Renewed Challenge: (26 March 2012, Facebook)*

The above example illustrated one of the multitude of benefits of social networking, namely that it allows organisations to support other digital marketing mediums, as noted in guiding argument **2E** (see section 2.6).

Third-party, related messaging: third-party messaging was added which was directly relevant to the brand and that functioned as an external endorsement for Acer and its properties.

Example: *Acer Iconia Tab A200 Review <http://ow.ly/9VLkx> (28 March 2012, Twitter)*

Messaging that promoted sharing: content was included that specifically aimed to increase the reach of messaging beyond that of the actual social networking account subscribers by encouraging users to share certain messages.

Example: *Space Renewed challenge: Got a friend you would like to challenge to try and beat your fastest time? Tag them in a comment to this post to invite them to a digital duel – enter here: (19 March 2012, Facebook)*

Visual messaging adopted a formal writing style: whilst the written copy adopted a conversational, informal tone, the messaging of the visual messaging was close-ended and more descriptive in nature.

Example:

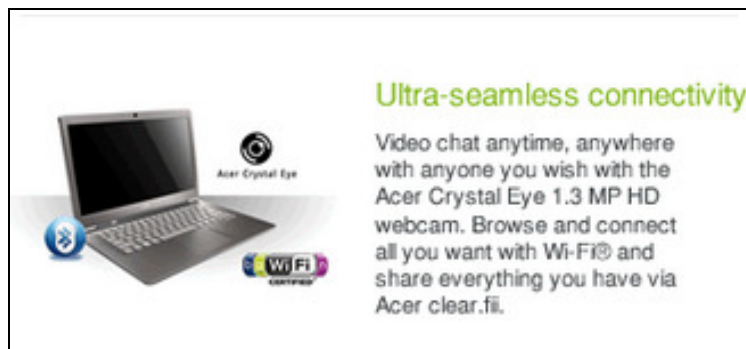


Image 5.2: A visual messaging example from one of the product info pages of the Space Renewed Challenge on Facebook. This illustrates the more formal and descriptive nature of the visual messaging.

Unrelated messaging that relayed information: whilst most of the content was promotionally centred, a considerable amount of messages did not directly relate to the Acer brand or any of its direct sub-brands and instead supplied users with information on subjects indirectly related to the Acer brand. Examples of this are the ‘Geek fact of the week’.

Example: *GEEK FACT OF THE DAY: It was decided that a CD should be long enough to hold Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which was precisely 72 minutes. (23 March 2012, Twitter)*

Unrelated messaging that relayed important events: another form of unrelated messaging that was included was messaging concerning events such as public holidays.

Example: *Happy Human Rights day to all of our fans! How are you spending the day? (21 March 2012, Twitter)*

Unrelated messaging that encouraged conversation: certain unrelated content had the main purpose of encourage user participation and feedback.

Example: *How are you going to make sure this weekend is awesome? (30 March 2012, Twitter)*

Messaging with more than one focal point: not all messaging could clearly be defined as having a single focus and incorporated more than once subject matter.

Example: *Geek Fact of the week: Tetris has sold over 40 million copies worldwide, since it began in 1982. That provided the creator 800 million in revenues – what do you think of the games in our Space Renewed Challenge? Enter here: (20 March 2012, Facebook)*

This concluded the process of the axial coding of the sampling source. In summary, it was deduced that although main messaging subjects were identified during the open coding process, there were distinguishing traits within these main messaging subjects that could lead to possible sub groupings.

Furthermore, it was discovered that message types do not only vary by subject, but also in function and approach, which highlighted additional criteria from which social networking categories could be defined. Finally, it was also found that some messages have more than one focus that might make them challenging to categorise.

5.2.3 Selective coding of social networking messaging: a list of typical social networking activities

A process of selective coding thereafter aimed to distinctly categorise the interdependent categories identified through a process of axial coding into a hierarchical theoretical model of typical social networking activities. As with the axial coding process, descriptions were included in order to increase the general trustworthiness of the categorisation process. By extending the sampling pool of the data source¹¹, the researcher increased the generalisability and transferability of the research, showing that the model developed could also be applied to other social networking messaging instances and timeframes. Furthermore, the credibility and accuracy of the data collection was once again confirmed, as the researcher's admin privileges also extended to this additional sampling pool.

The following main messaging categories and their sub-categories were identified¹²:

5.2.3.1 Campaign messaging

Campaign messaging engages social networking subscribers with respect to a campaign being run by the brand.

- Promotional: Messaging directly related to the promotion of a campaign currently being run on the platform or another platform that is owned by the brand.
Example: Have you entered our Perfect Match Competition yet? We choose the first winner tomorrow so make sure you've sent in your most creative entry. (22 December 2011, Twitter)
- Administrative: Messaging that helps guide users regarding a campaign's progression.

¹¹To illustrate the opinion that these were indeed typical social networking actions that do not only appear during a single campaign phase, the examples listed here are extracted from an expanded timeline of updates made on Acer Africa's social networking platforms (Facebook and Twitter), namely between November 2011 and September 2012.

¹² The researcher acknowledges that further inspection and analysis of the categories later in the actual research process could highlight the need for changes to these categories. To ensure the dependability of this study, however, such changes were highlighted, focussing on the justification thereof.

Example: *We've kept you in suspense for long enough.... The second winner of an Acer Aspire S3 Ultrabook is Mr Willem Smith. We're still waiting for our second winner of an Iconia w500 Tab to answer the phone – make sure you keep your cellphone nearby... (6 January 2012, Facebook)*

- Pre and post: Messaging related to a campaign that is transmitted before a campaign is implemented or after it had ended.

Example: *Our next competition is around the corner and it's BIG, really BIG.(24 April 2012, Twitter)*

- External: Messaging that introduces, promotes or describes one of the brand's campaigns on another marketing platform whether it be another social networking platform, another digital platform, broadcasting or print etc.

Example: *Your last chance to win an Iconia Wi-Fi tablet A500 worth R4999 – just tell us on Twitter: What would be your opening line if you were to deliver the budget speech? Competition closes at 12 this afternoon...(23 February 2012, Facebook)*

- Tie-in: Messaging that does not emphasise the campaign at first glance, but creates a connection with the campaign or its elements. Here, the campaign is directly mentioned, but isn't part of the initial focus of the messaging.

Example: *It's Friday the 13th – do you believe this to be a day of fortune or misfortune? For two lucky fans that entered our 'Perfect Match' Competition, it will definitely be a day of splendid fortune... (January 2012, Facebook)*

- Indirect: A message that is not directly relevant to the campaign, but on closer inspection includes an indirect reference to the campaign. Here, the campaign isn't directly mentioned, but a connection can be inferred.

Example: *The Iconia Tab w500 combines the best of both worlds: A PC and a Tablet – what other things can you think of that also fits the label 'Best of both worlds'? (January 2012, Facebook)*

5.2.3.2 Product and service

Messaging that relates to the deliverables of the brand, whether it be features, new offerings, price descriptions or any other aspect related to products and services.

- Promotional: Messaging directly related to the promotion of a product or service of the brand.

Example: *The powerful and fast Ultrabook S5 has a generously sized solid— find out more here:*
(18 October 2012, Twitter)

- Supportive: Messaging that is intended to support existing users regarding the products and services they have purchased from the brand.

Example: *ICS – will NOT be available for the A501, 3G Tablet – it's only available for the A500 Wifi Tablet* (15 August 2012, Twitter)

- Third-party: This is any type of product and service messaging that does not originate from the brand itself and is indicated as being the property of another entity.

Example: *Aspire S3 Review: "The Acer Aspire S3 is a small notebook with a big heart. It has a pretty face with the metallic finish, but make no mistake – this is one tough little computer." – read more here:* (28 August 2012, Facebook)

- Tie-in: Messaging that does not relate to product or service at first glance, but creates a connection with the brand's deliverables. Here, the product or service is directly mentioned, but isn't part of the initial focus of the messaging.

Example:



Image 5.3: A visual and written messaging combination transmitted on the Acer Facebook page on 8 August 2012. Whilst the written messaging does not refer to a product or service, a tie-in was created by means of the accompanied product related image.

- Indirect: A message not directly relevant to a product or service offering, but on closer inspection includes an indirect reference to one of these elements. Here, the product or service isn't directly mentioned, but a connection can be inferred.

Example: *Retweet this if you can't imagine a life without technology.* (24 February 2012, Twitter)

5.2.3.3 Brand messaging

Brand messaging can be communicated during a campaign period or outside of campaign periods on social networking platforms. The distinguishing factor is that these messages do not make reference to a campaign, even if the campaign is the main focus on the social networking page during that time period.

- Brand Identity: Messaging that directly refers to the brand in a general sense, its values or its personality.

Example: *Acer's outlook on the fast changing mobile world – a company with both mobility and innovation in its DNA.* (29 June 2012, Twitter)

- Internal: Messaging that refers to an internal segment of the organisation and could include staff, operations or management.

Example: *The Acer Synergy programme is a channel programme designed to reward resellers that are dedicated to growing their commercial business with Acer.* (31 July 2012, Facebook)

- Partnerships and sponsorships: Messaging that directly references an influential stakeholder group of the brand, which includes partnerships and sponsorships. The sponsor or partner can either be directly or indirectly incorporated into the message.

Example: *Olympics 101: The five Olympic rings represent the five major regions of the world – Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania, and every national flag in the world includes one of the five colours, which are (from left to right) blue, yellow, black, green, and red.* (8 May 2012, Facebook)

- Cross platform: Messaging that introduces, promotes or describes one of the brand's other platforms, whether it be another social networking platform, another digital platform, broadcasting or print etc.

Example: *Have you visited the South African web portal of the Acer website yet?* (29 December 2011, Twitter)

- Third-party: This is any type of brand messaging that does not originate from the brand itself and is indicated as being the property of another entity.

Example: *Great news – Acer has been ranked 5th in the 'Computer Hardware' category in 'The Top 500 Companies' publication. Click the 'Share' button to spread this great news! (7 May 2012, Twitter)*

- Tie-in: Messaging that does not emphasise the brand at first glance, but creates a connection with the brand or its properties. Here, the brand is directly mentioned but is not part of the initial focus of the messaging.

Example:

Click "Like" if you believe sustainability is key to a better planet.
And be sure to read about Acer's approach to sustainability at
<http://www.acer-group.com/public/Sustainability/index.htm>



Image 5.4: A visual and written messaging combination that was posted on the Acer Africa Facebook page on 17 September 2012. The initial messaging focus seems unrelated to the Acer brand, but as the message progresses, a tie-in was created.

- Indirect: A message not directly relevant to the campaign, but on closer inspection, this includes an indirect reference to the campaign. Here, the campaign isn't directly mentioned, but a connection can be inferred.

Example: *Can you imagine a life without technology? (December 2011, Facebook)*

5.2.3.4 Unrelated messaging

Unrelated messages have no observable direct or indirect relevance to the brand or a campaign that is being run by the brand. Also, there is no tie-in with the brand or campaign. They are included because of their ability to apply additional value to a social networking content schedule.

- Informative: Messages that add value by relaying some sort of educational or informative message to the fan.

Example: *An interesting story from our latest newsletter – cars of the future.* (1 June 2012, Facebook)

- Member-centric: Updates that are intended to thank fans, congratulate them or reward them. The focus of here is on actions of fans and the acknowledgement of these actions.

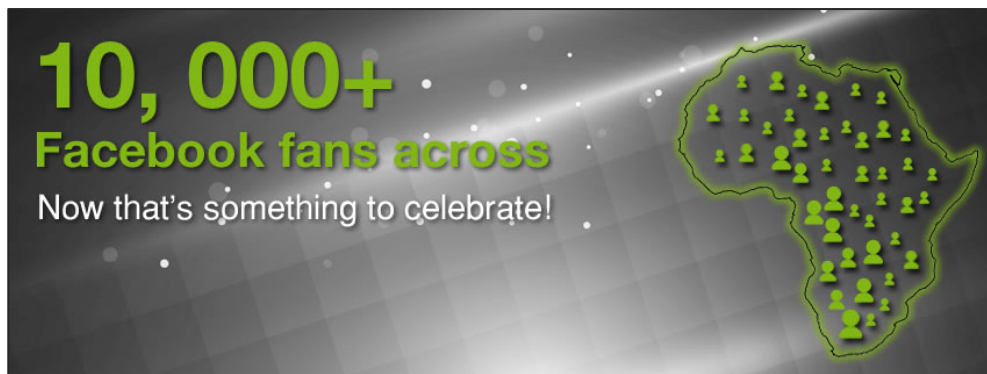


Image 5.5: A member-centric message that celebrated the fact that the Acer Facebook page reached 10,000 likes. (23 May 2012, Facebook)

Happy Acer fan, Casper Odendaal, sent us this pic of his brand new Acer All-in-One PC that he plans to use for his freelance design work.

Like this pic if owning an Acer PC will also help with your productivity levels!



Image 5.6: A written and visual messaging combination posted on 19 July 2012 on the Acer Facebook page. This illustrates how member-centric messages can reference and utilise both content originating from the organisation and the user to strengthen the impact of messaging. This example signified the ‘user-generated and co-created’ nature of social networking, as acknowledged in guiding argument **2A** (see section 2.2).

- Timely: Social networking messaging that utilises the timeliness of an unrelated event in order to create engagement for the unrelated brand.

Example: *Any New Year’s resolutions you would like to share? (6 January 2012, Twitter)*

- Engaging/Viral: Unrelated posts that encourage interaction via their open-ended nature.

Example: *What was your personal highlight of May and what are you looking forward to most in June? We would love to hear from you! (31 May 2012, Facebook)*

- Sponsored: Messages that are part of an arrangement by the brand to promote a third party’s brand or campaign.

Example: *An awesome competition for fans of the Springboks – check out WebAntics Online for more info <http://www.webantics.co.za/> (23 August 2012, Twitter)*

5.2.3.5 Advertised messaging

Advertised messaging refers to any type of planned messaging that is channelled through a paid mechanism on a social networking platform in order to increase the reach of that message.

Example:

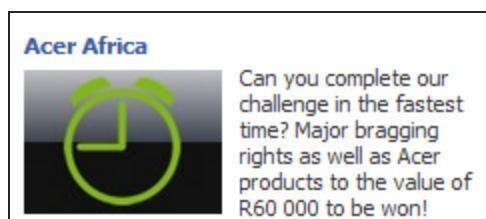


Image 5.7: A Facebook Marketplace ad that promoted the Space Renewed Challenge.

The inclusion and acknowledgment of highly targeted advertised messaging in this category supported the findings of guiding argument **2E** (see section 2.6) where it was noted that social networking accommodates highly targeted communications.

5.2.3.6 Hybrid messaging

This is any type of messaging that cannot be clearly defined as belonging to a specific category of either campaign, product and service or brand. These are messages that usually have more than one focus.¹³

- Brand / product and service messaging.

Example: A lot of FNB clients have started taking advantage of the addition of Acer products to their amazing device financing deals. Find out how to get the M3 Ultrabook, S3 Ultrabook or the V3 Notebook at exclusively low price points here: (3 September 2012, Facebook)

- Campaign / product and service messaging.

Example: The M3 is a powerful, ultra-slim Ultrabook that resumes from sleep in 2 seconds and connects to the internet lighting fast! Best of all, if you buy one from Incredible Connection, you stand the chance to win R700,000! Complete entry details here: (20 June 2012, Facebook)

- Campaign / brand messaging.

Example: An awesome competition for fans of the Springboks – Check out WebAntics Online for more info (23 August 2012, Twitter)

- Combined advertised messaging.

Example: The ultra-slim, ultra-smart and ultra-fast S3 Ultrabook is one of four Acer products up for grabs in our new competition – Play now! (Space Renewed Challenge campaign advertisement, Facebook)

In conclusion, a list of typical social networking actions, as deduced from the completed grounded theory process is presented:

¹³ Unrelated messaging could not be included as a hybrid messaging type, because if unrelated messaging is combined with another messaging type, it loses its defining characteristic of being wholly unrelated.

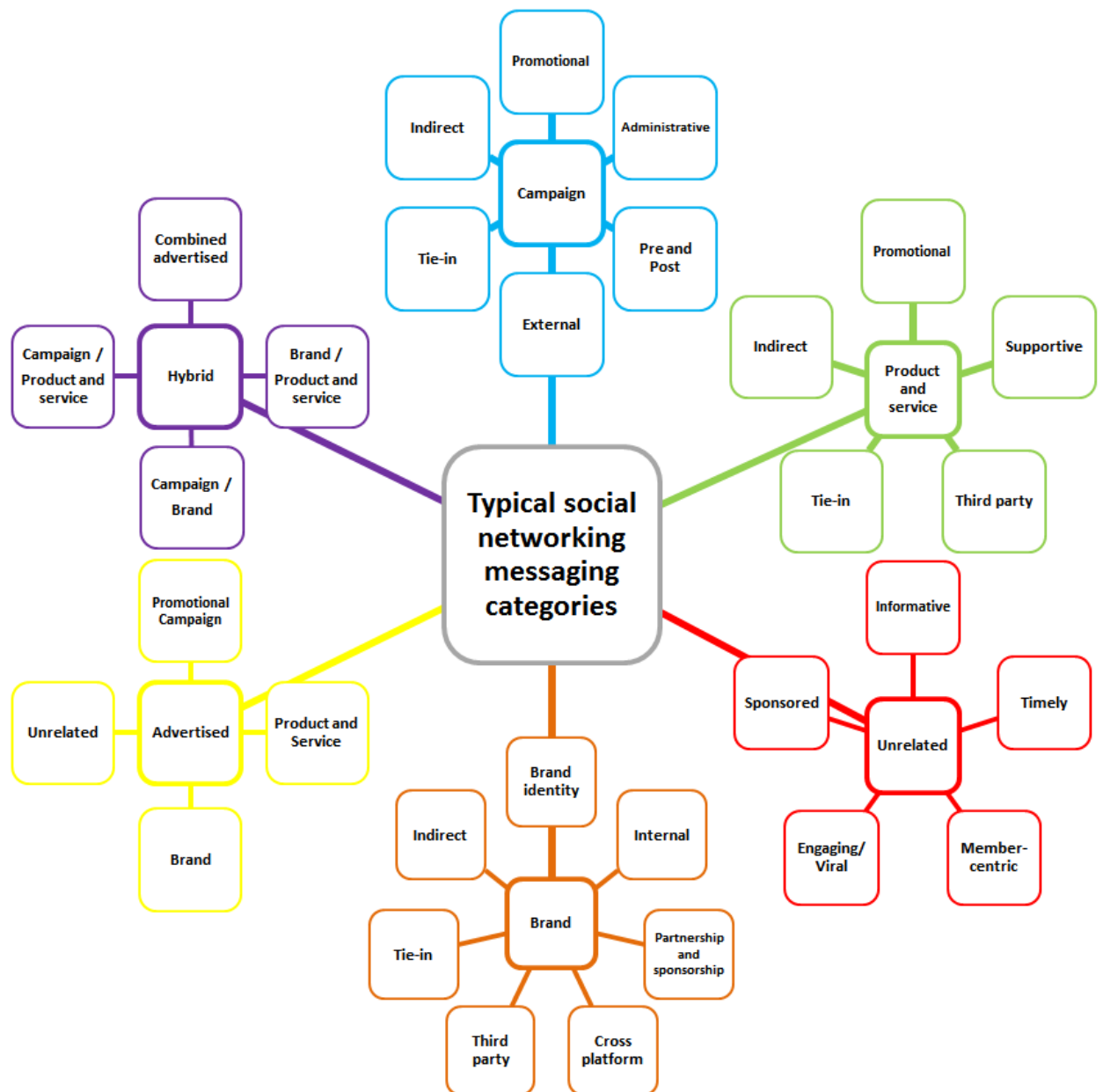


Figure 5.1: *The categorisation and sub-categorisation of typical social networking messaging*

The completed grounded theory process produced a non-exhaustive list of typical social networking messaging types performed by marketing practitioners. A remark is made with regards to the transferability of the model compiled: The researcher acknowledges the fact that this proposed list of typical social networking actions is to no degree perceived as an exhaustive list of messaging types performed by social networking practitioners. The social networking activities listed here were extracted from a specific organisation's social networking philosophy and implementation formula. This leads to the realisation that different models could possibly be observed from other sampling sources due to

differences in general and specific methods of implementing professional social networking activities. Rather, this model is proposed as a framework that could potentially assist social networking managers with planning and analysing their own social networking initiatives as it explains and explores the field of professional social networking. This introduces the viewpoint that social networking can be empirically explored and explained.

Taking a reflexive approach, the researcher acknowledges that the social networking actions identified were part of his own personal preference. As there are no defined rules in the social networking industry, it is also acknowledged that other social networking practitioners may recommend different classifications, based on their personal experiences. Furthermore, the researcher accepts the fact that the fast-changing nature of the social networking industry means that this list could also become obsolete in a few years' time, considering platform changes, technology advancements etc.

5.3 Pairing of social networking actions and marketing communications mix disciplines

With a list of typical social networking actions identified, the study then attempted to pair these actions with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006), as to ultimately infer that social networking activities can be aligned with modern marketing theories and principles. This process addressed the following main research question:

RQ4. How can social networking communication activities be paired with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, based on their theoretical resemblances?

The researcher notes that the pairing process between social networking categories and marketing communications disciplines led to greater insights into the social networking messaging categories defined in the previous section of this study. This process therefore highlighted the need to redefine and add descriptions to the social networking categories that were previously defined. Changes to the definitions were noted in order to ensure the dependability of the data analysis and its findings.

The researcher ascertained whether there was a connection between the disciplines of the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006) and the broad categories of social networking actions identified via the grounded theory process from the previous section of this chapter. A superficial connection between social networking actions and the disciplines of the marketing communications mix was previously observed in Chapter 3 and noted in guiding argument **3E** (see section 3.4).

This phase of the empirical research elaborated and expanded on the aforementioned observation by attempting a theoretical comparison between social networking actions and marketing communications

mix disciplines. To ensure the trustworthiness of the pairing process, the researcher based pairings on the tangible traits of each of the marketing communications mix disciplines, as laid out in Chapter 3 (see section 3.4) of this study and summarised in guiding arguments **3D2**, **3D3**, **3D4**, **3D5** and **3D6**. By having based this pairing process on a static, unchanging framework, the research findings were shown to be reliable.

5.3.1 Campaign messaging and the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix

As noted in guiding argument **3D3** (see section 3.4), the sales promotion discipline is divided into two broad categories of ‘Value increasing’¹⁴ and ‘value adding’ sales promotions. Examples of value-adding (non-monetary) promotions include samples, prize draws and competitions that centre on a product offering of a brand. In the case of Acer’s Space Renewed Challenge, the campaign was an ideal example of how organisations would typically run a competition on a business’ social networking page. Furthermore, the Space Renewed Challenge had a direct focus on the product offerings of Acer, as it incorporated them into the campaign and also offered them as actual rewards (prizes) to the fans who won the competition.

Taking this into consideration, a direct connection can be observed between campaign messaging on social networking platforms and the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix. This connection validates this theoretical pairing, with the conclusion being drawn that the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix is directly represented by campaign messaging on social networking platforms. When analysing the sub-categories of campaign messaging’s relation to sales promotion, it is observed that the different sub-categories illustrate that different aspects of a sales promotion can be managed via social networking channels. These sales promotions can either directly promote the promotion (promotional messaging), supervise it (administrative messaging), announce and tease it (pre-messaging) or provide follow-up communications (post-messaging) regarding the sales promotion.

From this newly established pairing, a more detailed description (that is aligned with the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix) of the campaign messaging category of

¹⁴ The researcher notes that ‘value increasing’ sales promotions (discount pricing, money-off coupons, refunds, guarantees etc.), as well as other ‘value-adding’ sales promotions such as product trial, refunds, guarantees and so forth are also part of the Campaign messaging category of typical social networking actions, even though such an example was not extracted from the sampling source.

social networking actions was proposed. It was also suggested that campaign messaging be referred to as 'Promotional messaging'¹⁵, as non-promotional campaigns are excluded from this category:

Promotional campaign messaging engages social networking subscribers with regards to a sales promotion campaign being run by the brand. This can either be administered directly from the social networking account itself, such as a competition or giveaway, or it can relate to a sales promotion that can either be value- increasing (discount pricing, money-off coupons, refunds, guarantees etc.) or value adding (samples, prize draws, product trial, competitions etc.) in nature.

5.3.2 Product and service messaging and the direct marketing discipline of the marketing communications mix

Guiding argument **3D6**(see section 3.4) states that direct marketing actions are personalised, data-driven, interactive marketing communications activities that promote a specific offering by means of a strong call to action, supporting the nurturing of intimate consumer relationships. With this description taken into consideration, an obvious connection between product and service messaging on social networking platforms and the direct marketing discipline of the marketing communications mix exists, namely that both are focussed on delivering messages regarding the organisation's deliverables. Furthermore, the personalised nature of direct marketing initiatives echoes with the personal nature of social networking messaging in general. This is yet another validation of the appropriateness of this theoretical pairing.

Another important distinction of the direct marketing discipline is that it aims to build a personal relationship with the customer which helps to nurture lifetime customers in comparison to once-off sales. The supportive sub-category of product and service social networking messaging is specifically intended to help maintain and develop a continuous relationship with existing and new customers. The supportive sub-category of product and service messaging is therefore a highly appropriate method of sustaining the long-term relationships that are characteristic of the direct marketing discipline. With these connections taken into consideration, an expanded definition of product and service messaging on social networking platforms was proposed:

Product and service messaging communicates details concerning the deliverables of the organisation. It is usually intended to promote deliverables but also focuses on the nurturing of a long-term relationship between the organisation and its potential, as well as existing client base.

¹⁵ The researcher acknowledges that the sales promotion discipline does not accommodate social networking campaigns strictly related to the brand, as there has to be a focus on product for this to be applicable. As these campaigns would incorporate both elements of campaign messaging and brand messaging, it was listed as a sub category of hybrid messaging.

5.3.3 Brand messaging and the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix

Two of the main roles of public relations within a marketing context are the achievement of heightened brand and organisational visibility and the nurturing of honest stakeholder interest (as noted in guiding argument **3D5**, see section 3.4). The role of heightened brand and organisational visibility signifies the public relations disciplines of the marketing communications mix's inherent link with brand messaging on social networking platforms. Brand messaging is not intended to promote any product or service of the organisation, but rather a specific element of the organisation's brand or the brand image in its entirety. Another example of the manner in which brand messaging on social networking platforms can promote organisational visibility is through the sub category of internal messaging, that provides the social networking subscriber with a look at the inner structure and the people behind the organisation. Social networking messaging concerning the sub category partnerships and sponsorships, however, can create increasingly positive brand image if the brand is aligned with other brands that have positive brand perceptions.

Guiding argument **3D5**(see section 3.4) also includes the observation that public relations initiatives that are from an external source are perceived as endorsements for the brand, which gives them a higher sense of credibility and can therefore have a powerful effect on brand sentiment and help to nurture honest stakeholder interest. The social networking brand messaging sub-category of third party messaging provides the ideal classification for external public relations messaging on social networking platforms, as this category is reserved for messaging concerning the brand that is sourced from external sources. These messages have a higher sense of credibility, as they do not have the same sense of self-promotion that other message types on social networking platforms do. Taking the above pairing of brand messaging on social networking platforms and the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix into consideration, an expanded description of social networking brand messaging was proposed:

Brand messaging is social networking messaging that does not relate to the deliverables of the organisation, but rather focusses on a specific element of the brand identity or the brand identity in its entirety. In so doing, it promotes a heightened sense of organisational visibility and can also nurture honest stakeholder interest if brand endorsement originates from external sources.

5.3.4 Unrelated messaging and the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix

Whilst public relations' roles of heightened brand visibility and the nurturing of honest stakeholder interest can be achieved on social networking platforms by means of brand messaging, another crucial element of public relations that cannot be accommodated by brand messaging exists. The public

relations discipline of the marketing communications mix also helps to build a general sense of goodwill between the organisation and its stakeholders (see guiding argument **3D5**, section 3.4).

Seeing that unrelated messaging on social networking platforms does not relate to brand or deliverables, it cannot achieve heightened brand visibility or promote products and services. However, it does help to nurture a sense of goodwill between the organisation and its social networking subscribers, as these messages usually have a positive, emotional link that could potentially resonate with a social networking account subscriber. Even though this sense of goodwill does not revolve around the brand or its deliverables, it does create a connection with the brand, as the social networking subscriber receives this communication directly from the brand itself. Taking the above into consideration, a pairing of the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix with unrelated social networking messaging is also propagated as a stand-alone pairing from public relations and brand messaging on social networking.

To further substantiate this viewpoint, the ways in which different sub categories of unrelated messaging build a sense of goodwill was explored: The unrelated sub category of informative messaging builds a sense of goodwill by giving the subscriber free access to helpful information; timely messaging builds goodwill by showing that the brand appreciates unrelated events that the subscriber cares about; engaging messaging can build goodwill by evoking an emotional response from subscribers and lastly, member-centric messaging can build a sense of goodwill as it creates the perception that the brand appreciates its social networking subscribers and understands their wants and needs. Taking the above into consideration, an elaborated description of unrelated social networking messaging was proposed:

Unrelated messages have no observable direct or indirect relevance to the brand or sales promotions being hosted. Also, there is no tie-in with the brand or campaign. They are included simply because of a certain quality they possess that gives them the ability to create a sense of goodwill between the organisation and its social networking subscribers. This sense of goodwill can be achieved through different mechanisms, such as by providing informative content, evoking emotional responses, relaying timely messaging or by communicating member-centric messaging.

5.3.5 Advertised messaging and the advertising discipline of the marketing communications mix

Guiding argument **3D2** (see section 3.4) summarises the advertising discipline of the marketing communications mix as follows:

Guiding argument 3D2

Advertising, the most visible of the marketing communications disciplines is a non-personal, paid form of communication with a high level of control that is especially adept at increasing brand awareness, brand equity and a level of competitive advantage for organisations. It can be used to promote an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor, but its capacity to persuade consumers is, however, suspect.

Two important distinctions of this marketing discipline, namely the fact that it is a paid medium and that it is the most visible of the marketing communications mix disciplines signify the pairing of this discipline with social networking messaging category of advertising. Advertised messaging on social networking platforms are paid for messaging by the organisation and are by far the most visible form of messaging, as it dramatically increases the reach of messaging, which includes users on the social networking account that is not currently subscribed to the brand's social networking pages. Whilst it is noted that advertising is non-personal in nature, the personal and direct nature of social networking platforms means that this characteristic of the advertising discipline isn't universally applicable to advertised messages on social networking platforms. Though the degree to which advertising formats on social networking platforms are personal can vary, it is noted that the advertising forms used on Facebook and Twitter (the main focus of this study) are mainly personal in nature. In this regard, advertising on social networking platforms is unique when compared to advertising on other digital and print platforms, as it does not conform to the non-personal trait that is typical for this discipline of the marketing communications mix.

Guiding argument **3D2** (see section 3.4) also indicated the distinctions between the different types of advertising. The sub-categories of advertised messaging on social networking platforms accommodate such distinctions, as advertising messages on social networking platforms can either relate to a sales promotion (campaign messaging), a product or service (product or service messaging), the organisation itself (brand messaging) or a subject not related to the brand (unrelated). Due to this pairing analysis, the description of advertising messaging on social networking platforms was redefined:

Advertised messaging refers to any type of planned messaging on a social networking platform that is channelled through a paid mechanism on a social networking platform in order to extend the reach of the message to a social networking audience not necessarily subscribed to the organisation's social networking accounts. Advertised messages can either focus on a sales promotion, the brand's deliverables, the organisation itself or an unrelated subject that builds a sense of goodwill.

5.3.6 Unplanned messaging and the personal selling discipline of the marketing communications mix

The only marketing communications discipline that has not yet been paired with one of the categories of social networking messaging is that of personal selling. It is noted that personal selling is an interpersonal communication tool that involves face-to-face interactions undertaken by individuals in order to inform, persuade or remind an individual or group to take appropriate action (Guiding argument **3D4**, see section 3.4). The interpersonal nature of personal selling creates an immediate connection with the highly personal, conversational nature of social networking messaging, signifying the need to incorporate this highly effective marketing discipline into the categories of social networking messaging types previously defined. The personal nature of personal selling interactions between a consumer and an organisational representative, however, take place in real-time, making it difficult to script or plan these conversations.

With respect to social networking messaging, this means that personal selling conversations aren't typically included in the social networking content schedules planned by social networking community managers, in contrast with the other social networking messaging types previously identified in this chapter. Nevertheless, these conversations do take place regularly on social networking platforms, in the form of personal (one-on-one) direct messaging conversations between the social networking account representative and the consumer¹⁶. In personal message threads, communication takes place on a one-on-one basis, giving the consumer and brand the opportunity to privately discuss new product developments, brand related subjects and many other topics. Guiding argument **3D4**(see section 3.4) also observes that personal selling can be used to complement other business efforts; This is also applicable to personal selling instances on social networking platforms, as it gives the social networking representative the opportunity to engage the customer with regards to other topics relating to promotions, brand and so forth. An additional social networking messaging category was therefore proposed:

Direct messaging

One-on-one conversational message threads between a brand's social networking page representative and an existing or potential customer. During these message threads, a customer that has initiated a conversation with the brand is persuaded or informed with respect to the product and service offerings

¹⁶ Note, however, that these conversations are mostly initiated by the consumer, as most social networking accounts protect users from unsolicited personal communication threads from businesses. This is also the channel through which most customer support functions are performed on social networking platforms.

of the brand. These messaging instances can also be utilised to strengthen and support other social networking messaging types, such as brand and promotional campaigns. Personal message threads regarding customer complaints and other customer service functions are excluded from this category, as their primary role is not marketing.

5.3.7 Hybrid messaging and the marketing communications mix disciplines

As noted in the previous section of this chapter, the researcher made provision for the possibility that it might not be possible to clearly define to which category of social networking messaging a specific message belongs to. This occurs when a message type contains distinguishing characteristic types of more than one social networking messaging category, usually observable in complex social networking messages where it is difficult to determine the main focus of the communication. Because of this phenomenon, it can be expected that these message types will also display characteristics of different marketing communications mix disciplines, as each separate social networking message category has been shown to represent a certain marketing communications mix discipline.

An example of hybrid messaging is a campaign or promotion concerning the brand that does not make reference to the product. Whilst such messaging follows the same formula as promotional campaign messaging and could therefore be paired with the sales promotion marketing communications discipline, the sales promotion discipline does not make any provision for promotions that are not related to the product. In light of this, such a message must be regarded as a brand message type, which has been paired with the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix. This conflict concerning the category in which a message belongs can be resolved by categorising it as a hybrid form of social networking messaging. Under this labelling, the message can be analysed according to both the principles of promotional campaign messaging, as well as brand messaging. Noting this theoretical pairing, the following expanded definition of hybrid social networking messaging was proposed:

Hybrid messaging is any type of messaging that cannot be clearly defined as belonging to one of the main categories of campaign, product and service, direct, brand or unrelated messaging. These are complex messages that contain more than one main focus, giving them characteristics of multiple social networking categories and consequently, multiple disciplines of the marketing communications mix.

As noted in the introduction to this section, the process of pairing marketing communications mix disciplines with the social networking messaging previously defined led to an expanded and redefined categorising of these social networking categories. This process increased the trustworthiness of the social networking categories defined, as they were shown to include direct parallels with modern marketing theory and practice. In so doing, the model earned a sense of dependability, as the categories

defined were shown to also be applicable to a different framework from the researcher's personal model for implementing social networking activities. A summarised list of the adapted social networking messaging types, paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix is presented:

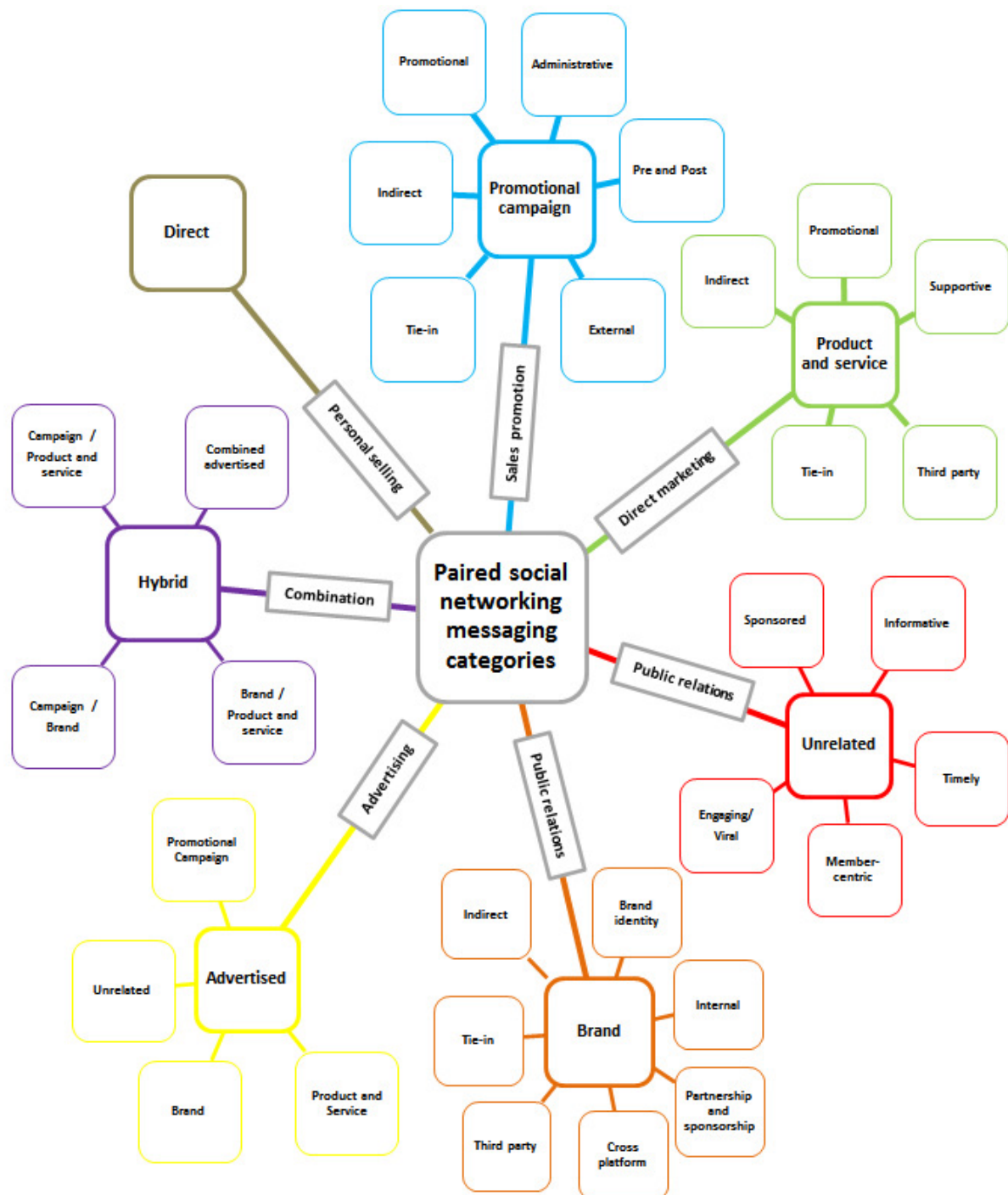


Figure 5.2: The categorisation and sub-categorisation of typical social networking messaging, paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix.

The pairing of social networking messaging and marketing communications mix disciplines has indicated that an inherent connection between modern marketing theory and professional networking exists and that social networking has the capacity to accommodate a complete range of marketing disciplines.

5.4 Conclusion

With the study's theoretical underpinnings discussed and the research design presented, the penultimate chapter of the research study initiated a process of empirical exploration of data, with the aim of addressing two of the study's research questions.

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) model of grounded theory was utilised for the purpose of identifying a non-exhaustive list of typical social networking actions. These social networking actions were grouped into a set of interdependent categories (and sub-categories) by means of a three-phase coding process that involved both superficial and more in-depth coding procedures. With the categories defined, the study's third research question was addressed:

RQ3. What are the different communication activities typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence?

With a list of typical social networking actions compiled, the study referred back to the main theoretical underpinning of the study, namely the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix (Fill, 2006), as discussed in Chapter 3 of the study. By comparing the theoretical traits of each of the marketing communications mix disciplines with the characteristics of each of the social networking messaging categories (as explored via the grounded theory process) the marketing communications mix disciplines were paired with the social networking actions. This process showed that an inherent link exists between social networking marketing initiatives and the five marketing communications mix disciplines, addressing the study's fourth research question:

RQ4. How can social networking communication activities be paired with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, based on their theoretical resemblances?

The following chapter will build on the empirical findings of Chapter 5 by implementing a process of action research in order to propose guideline for the strategic implementation of professional social networking.

CHAPTER 6

A STRATEGIC GUIDELINE FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKING BY MEANS OF ACTION RESEARCH

6.1 Introduction

With a link between social networking and the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix established, the empirical process continued to explore the applicability of social networking as a marketing tool by assessing the strategic capacity of the theoretical model that was proposed. An assessment of the strategic relevance of this model was a crucial requirement of the study as it ensured that the model could be used as a strategic guideline by which to implement social networking initiatives.

In Chapter 6, the study will focus on an exploration of the its final research question:

RQ5. What will a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented entail?

The importance of a strategic approach to social networking was accentuated in guiding argument **2F** (see section 2.7). To accomplish this, the researcher applied the proposed model to the original sampling source, exploring the strategic considerations that it implied with regards to the manner in which social networking messaging should be strategically implemented on professional social networking brand accounts. Based on this analysis, a general guideline was proposed for the strategic implementation of marketing communications within a social networking communication context.

Susman and Evered's (1978) proposed cyclical procedure for implementing action research (see section 4.4.2) was used as a framework for the action research process that was needed to explore specific research question 5.

6.2 Diagnosing: assessing the strategic alignment of the previous social networking messaging strategy

Before a series of actions that needed to be applied to a new Acer social networking content schedule could be proposed, the content schedule applied during the Space Renewed Challenge needed to be analysed regarding the representation of social networking categories. This was necessary in order to assess whether the representation was adequate when compared to the main considerations for implementing the marketing communications mix disciplines (as discussed in Chapter 3). Once again, tangible modern marketing theory from a range of authors was used as a framework from which to approach the analysis that followed. By doing so, the action research process was grounded in a static, dependable framework that gave the analysis a sense of dependability. The following observations were

made concerning the representation of social networking categories during the Acer Space Renewed Challenge:

6.2.1 Promotional campaign messaging (sales promotion)

The visual messaging during the campaign was centred exclusively around the campaign. The majority of the written messaging during the campaign period focussed on the campaign itself, either directly, by means of a tie-in or in some cases, by means of an indirect approach. The written promotional campaign messaging included promotional, administrative and pre and post campaign messaging. The written content schedule also included mention of external promotions that were run in the physical partner stores of Acer, but received a minimal amount of focus in comparison with the Space Renewed Challenge promotion itself. Taking this into consideration, it can be inferred that within the main category of promotional campaign messaging (as an isolated observation) a representative balance of sub-categories existed. Seeing as promotional campaign messaging has been shown to represent the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix, it stands to reason that this was the most well represented discipline during the Space Renewed Challenge.

6.2.2 Product and service messaging (direct marketing)

A minimal amount of communication related to products and services, outside of the reference of a promotional campaign being run by the brand, either directly from the platform itself or from an external platform. Of the product and service messaging that was included, only the sub-category of promotional product and service messaging and third party product and service messaging was represented. Supportive, tie-in and indirect product and service messaging was either not represented on the social networking accounts, or included in such a subtle way, that the indirect connection couldn't be clearly observed. In conclusion, product and service messaging was under-represented in both an overall degree and also in terms of a variety of sub categories of this main category. Because of the connection established between the direct marketing discipline and product and service messaging on social networking platforms, it can furthermore be inferred that this marketing communications discipline was poorly represented during the campaign, both in sheer volume and diversity of type.

6.2.3 Brand messaging (public relations)

As with product and service messaging, brand messaging was also represented poorly in comparison to promotional campaign messaging during the campaign period. Of the brand messaging that was included, almost all messaging was dedicated to subjects related to sponsorships and partnerships of the brand. A minimal degree of direct brand identity messaging was included, with no observable sign of

internal messaging, cross platform messaging, third-party messaging, tie-in messaging or indirect messaging. From the above it was clear that there was a noticeable imbalance with regards to the variety of brand messaging sub-categories and brand messaging in general. Brand messaging's link with the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix resulted in these observations being applicable to the representation of this discipline during the campaign.

6.2.4 Unrelated messaging (public relations)

In general, unrelated messaging was also poorly represented during the Space Renewed Challenge. Of the unrelated message types that were included, only the informative and timely unrelated messaging sub-categories were included in the content strategy. Member-centric, viral and sponsored messaging made no observable appearance, signifying a clear lack of these message types in the content. A lack of unrelated messaging type diversity was therefore evident. As unrelated messaging was also shown to have an inherent connection with the marketing communications mix discipline of public relations, the conclusion can be made that this discipline was under-represented during the course of the campaign.

6.2.5 Advertised messaging (advertising)

The advertised messaging category was well represented during the campaign on Facebook due to the inclusion of a series of marketplace ads that were implemented on the page. Of the four ads that were implemented, all of them focussed on the Space Renewed Challenge and were therefore categorised according to the promotional campaign sub-category. The other sub-categories of product and service, brand and unrelated advertised messaging were all absent during the Space Renewed Challenge.¹⁷ Taking the above into consideration, the advertising discipline was well represented during the campaign regarding quantity, but poorly represented in terms of diversity of messaging types.

6.2.6 Direct messaging (personal selling)

During the campaign, no attempt was made to implement direct messaging conversations between page members and the brand representative. Whilst direct messaging was received during the campaign time period from social networking platform subscribers, these conversations were never treated as possible product education or selling opportunities. Instead, conversations revolved around queries concerning the Space Renewed Challenge and technical or device repair queries (customer support). Because of this, the marketing discipline of personal selling was not utilised during the Space Renewed Challenge.

¹⁷There was no advertising budget spent on Twitter during the campaign, but this was a strategic decision, as Acer's efforts are focussed on their Facebook presence.

6.2.7 Hybrid messaging (Combination of marketing mix disciplines)

In some rare cases, it was difficult to determine the actual main focus of specific social networking messaging instances. In most of these cases, a hybrid of product and service and sales promotion messaging existed. This therefore implied that the marketing communications mix disciplines of direct marketing and sales promotion were combined in certain situations during the campaign.

A summary of the above analysis of social networking messaging categories is presented:

- **Promotional campaign messaging (sales promotion)**
Adequate representation in terms of amount and variety.
- **Product and service messaging (direct marketing)**
Inadequate representation with regards to quantity and diversity.
- **Brand messaging (public relations)**
Inadequate representation with concerns to quantity and diversity in general. Sponsorship brand messaging was however adequately represented.
- **Unrelated messaging (public relations)**
Inadequate representation with concerns to amount and variety.
- **Advertised messaging (advertising)**
Adequately represented in terms of quantity, but inadequately represented in terms of diversity.
- **Direct messaging (personal selling)**
No representation.
- **Hybrid messaging (combination of marketing mix disciplines)**
Evident in some rare cases, with a combination of direct marketing and sales promotion being the most prominent.

Therefore, only the marketing communications mix discipline of sales promotion was well represented in terms of variety and quantity. Whilst advertising was well represented in terms of quantity, it lacked

diversity in messaging sub-categories. Both public relations and direct marketing was under-represented in terms of quantity and diversity. Personal selling was absent during the Space Renewed Challenge.

6.3 Action planning: planning changes to Acer's previous social networking messaging strategy

With the marketing communications mix representation diagnosed, the main considerations for the implementation of marketing communications mix disciplines were then referenced (see section 3.6) in order to assess if the representation of marketing communications mix elements was strategically adequate during the campaign. The considerations that will be focussed on were informed by guiding argument **3F**:

Guiding argument 3F:

The choice, combination and level of intensity of each discipline in the marketing communications mix is dependent on a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration if marketing communications are to be implemented strategically to solve or manage a marketing challenge. The most prominent of these factors identified are the key characteristics of each tool; product complexity; the influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers and the objectives of marketing initiatives. Marketing communications disciplines must be used in synergy in a marketing campaign or task in order to achieve results that are strategically aligned with the overall corporate strategy of an organisation.

Based on this reference point, action plans could be suggested in order to improve the strategic relevance of marketing communications mix disciplines for future social networking campaigns hosted by Acer.

6.3.1 The key characteristics of each tool and how they contribute to marketing objectives¹⁸

To assess the applicability of the exact combination of marketing communications mix disciplines during the campaign, each discipline's capacity to fulfil certain functions (based on their inherent characteristics) needed to be taken into consideration. The main agenda of the campaign was to increase sales and create awareness for the Acer Aspire S3 Ultrabook and other Acer devices in the

¹⁸ The key characteristics of each tool were stipulated in section 3.6, table 3.1. This discussion and analysis was based on this theoretical underpinning.

social networking realm. Taking this into consideration, marketing disciplines with a high capacity for reaching a large audience and that focussed on the brand's products would be the most suitable discipline for reaching this objective. Based on table 3.1 (see section 3.6) of discipline characteristics, a combination of advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing would therefore be the most suitable disciplines for communicating product related messaging to a large audience base. Furthermore, as product awareness was the main emphasis during the campaign, it would stand to reason that the marketing communications mix discipline related directly to this objective, in that direct marketing should have been the main focus during the campaign. Whilst advertising and especially sales promotion were well represented and utilised during the Space Renewed Challenge, the direct marketing discipline was severely under-utilised as a stand-alone discipline. It did, however, appear more frequently as a hybrid message type along with sales promotion messaging. Example: *What prize in the Space Renewed Challenge are you most excited for? The All-in-one PC, Projector, Tablet or Ultrabook?* (28 March 2012, Twitter). Even though advertising was well represented during the campaign, it lacked an emphasis on product and service advertising, which could have supported the campaign's main objective if included into the messaging representation.

Apart from the main objective of generating product awareness, there was a secondary objective of promoting the partnership between Microsoft and Acer (public relations). This signified the need for the inclusion of messaging that promotes this partnership. Looking at the content schedule for the Space Renewed Challenge, there was a considerable amount of sponsorship related messaging, but this could have been increased with regards to diversity of messaging focus in order to highlight different aspects of Microsoft's identity and product range¹⁹.

Taking the above diagnosis into consideration, the following actions were suggested in order to resolve the issues identified:

- Rebalance the campaign content plan so that a more equal balance between direct marketing (product and service messaging) and sales promotion (promotional campaign) messaging can be achieved. Hybrid messaging of direct marketing and sales promotion can also be utilised as this serves a dual function, but focus here should be on direct marketing. Advertised messaging should include less campaign messaging and more forms of product and service messaging.

¹⁹ The researcher acknowledges that the Space Renewed Challenge had additional objectives, but because these do not directly pertain to the characteristics of the marketing communication mix disciplines, these will be discussed in a separate section under 'Marketing objectives'.

- Rebalance the degree of public relations representation by including more messaging centred around the partnership between Acer and Microsoft.

6.3.2 The influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers

Another element that needed to be taken into consideration when deciding on the combination of marketing communications mix elements was each disciplines' influence on the decision making process.²⁰

As sales were an important objective for the campaign, it was crucial that marketing communications mix disciplines were included that help to stimulate sales. From figure 3.2, it becomes clear that the focus should definitely be on sales promotion and personal selling. Whilst sales promotion was well represented during the campaign, personal selling was notably absent during the campaign, as new opportunities were created or utilised to engage social networking fans in personal selling conversations. Based on this, the following action plan was suggested:

- Whilst personal selling initiatives cannot be planned and scripted, the social networking manager must be aware of the necessity of this marketing communications discipline during the campaign. This will enable him/her to identify possible personal selling opportunities, utilising them with the intent of persuading users to purchase certain Acer devices, and in so doing, stimulating sales in a general sense.

6.3.3 Product complexity

As noted in guiding argument **3F**, product complexity and product involvement should also be taken into consideration when planning the combination of marketing communications mix disciplines. Products with a low level of complexity will benefit most from a strong advertising campaign, whereas more complex and costly products will benefit from a personal selling focussed approach. As Acer's products are complex technological lifestyle devices, it stands to reason that personal selling should be a major part of the marketing strategy. As already stated, personal selling, was however, not present during the campaign. Taking the above into consideration, the following suggested action plan was proposed:

- Once again, the importance of personal selling was highlighted. It was highly recommended that this be included in the social networking messaging strategy of Acer.

²⁰ Figure 3.2 from section 3.6 of chapter 3 is referenced here: 'Each discipline in the marketing communications mix's influence on the buying process.'

6.3.4 The objectives of the Acer Space Renewed Challenge initiatives

Whilst most of the objectives of the campaign were already discussed at this point of the empirical study, it was necessary to ensure that all of the campaign objectives were considered separately when planning a strategic marketing plan. The final campaign objective that was not yet dealt with during this analysis was 'to grow an audience for Acer's social networking platforms'. Facebook's advertising system is regarded as an effective way of marketing to a broad target audience as this increases the reach of a brand's Facebook initiatives (see section 2.3.1). The higher messaging reach consequently also increases the number of opportunities available to the brand to grow its social networking audience base. As observed earlier, the campaign did include advertising activations, but it lacked the advertised messaging sub categories (i.e. diversity). A more diverse range of advertising messaging could have improved the growth effect of advertising messages, as it could have prevented 'advertising fatigue' and also represented the brand as a more diverse, useful social networking account to subscribe to.

Another way of stimulating growth is to add content rich messaging that increases the virality of messaging and in so doing, results in a greater social networking audience base reach for messaging in general. This is due to platform subscribers endorsing the origination's messaging to their social networking circles. A typical method of achieving richness in content is to include more unrelated messaging (both in quantity and diversity) that does not aim to promote the brand or any of its products and services. The previous analysis of Acer's messaging during the Space Renewed Challenge highlighted the fact that unrelated messaging was poorly represented in both quantity and diversity.

In light of the above shortcomings with respect to the manner in which the social networking messaging plan helps to achieve the marketing objectives of a campaign, the following action plans were suggested:

- Whilst advertising was included in the campaign, it was suggested that its representation be increased as opposed to diversity, so that additional sub-categories of advertised messaging could be included during the campaign.
- The representation of unrelated messaging could be increased with regards to both quantity and diversity.

6.3.5 Acer's global strategy

Acer's general strategy of maintaining and enhancing its prominent position in the lifestyle device industry (see section 4.6.1) links to the sales objectives of the Space Renewed Challenge and once again, highlights the importance of sales promotion, direct marketing and personal selling as a consistent element in the social networking messaging strategy of the organisation.

A global Acer strategy that, however, does not directly link with the objectives of the Space Renewed Challenge is that of 'Positioning Acer as an innovative and forward-thinking leader in the technological industry as a whole' (see section 4.6.1). The Space Renewed Challenge's objectives highlighted the need for increased sales, the promotion of the partnership between Acer and Microsoft, as well as the growth of a social networking audience. None of these objectives, however, related to the importance of the Acer brand itself and how it should be strengthened by utilising all of Acer's marketing platforms, as this is a global strategy. As already observed, brand messaging was poorly represented during the campaign period on Acer's social networking platforms, especially that directly pertaining to the communication of facets regarding the Acer brand itself. Whilst the sub-category of partnership messaging featured strongly during the campaign, there were only a few instances of the other sub-categories of brand messaging, namely brand identity, internal, cross platform, third-party, tie-in and indirect. A better representation of brand messaging (in terms of variety and quantity) during the campaign would support Acer's global brand positioning strategy and objective.

Taking the above analysis into consideration, the following action plans were proposed:

- As highlighted earlier, the campaign's main emphasis should be on sales promotions, direct marketing and personal selling related messaging.
- Brand messaging should be increased with regards to both diversity and quantity in order to promote the Acer brand in its entirety.

With this analysis documented, the findings were used to suggest an informed set of actions to ensure that Acer's content plan reflected the strategic alignment of the organisation. A summary of the action plans proposed from the diagnosis of Acer's Space Renewed Challenge social networking messaging and overall Acer objectives is therefore presented:

- Equal balance of product and service messaging and promotional campaign messaging by means of separate category or cross-category (hybrid) messaging.
- Advertised messaging should include less campaign sub-category messaging and more forms of product and service sub-category messaging, as well as the other sub-categories.
- Brand messaging should be increased with respect to both diversity and quantity. More diversity in Acer and Microsoft partnership messaging.
- Opportunities for personal selling must be identified and utilised.
- Increase unrelated messaging with respect to both quantity and diversity.

These suggestions were then transferred and applied to an unplanned social networking campaign of Acer in order to illustrate how the study's proposed model for implementing professional social networking messaging could be practically implemented.

6.4 Diagnosing: assessing the strategic requirements of the new social networking messaging strategy

Before the next phase of action research, namely action taking could commence, the succeeding campaign to which the suggestions were applied needed to be discussed, with the main focus of the discussion being on the way it resembled and differed from the Space Renewed Challenge. This was necessary as certain differences could have signalled the need for an alteration of the suggestions, as they might not have been wholly transferrable to the Acer and FNB October 2012 joint campaign. As an introduction, the overall chronological development of the campaign is presented:

During a marketing planning and strategy meeting with Acer public relations and Marketing staff members in early September 2012, it was decided to devise a sales stimulating social networking messaging campaign for Acer. The campaign had the main objective of promoting a new series of discounted Acer laptop finance deals that are exclusively available to First National Bank clients. In response to this, the researcher (who also operated as the social networking manager of the campaign) suggested the planning and implementation of a Facebook campaign that would engage Acer Facebook subscribers whilst simultaneously promoting the Acer product discounts available through FNB. Acer approved this plan and consequently also approved the campaign that was to be implemented on the Acer Facebook page between 1 October 2012 and 2 November 2012. The researcher planned Acer's social networking content strategy accordingly for the period of 1 October 2012 to 2 November 2012 around this campaign, utilising a process of action research in order to assess the strategic relevance of the study's theoretical pairing of social networking messaging types with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix.

With a brief background of the campaign discussed, the ways in which the campaign differed from the Space Renewed Challenge with regards to the considerations to be taken into account when deciding on the exact combination of marketing communications mix disciplines, was then deliberated in order to initiate the first step in the action research process.

As with the Space Renewed Challenge, one of the main aims of the campaign was to raise awareness around Acer products (The Aspire V3, S3 and M3) and also stimulate sales of the aforementioned products. Therefore, the social networking messaging suggestions proposed to improve the reaching of this aim in the Space Renewed Challenge could also be made applicable to the Acer and FNB joint

October 2012 Campaign. Taking this into consideration, the following suggestions were transferred from the Space Renewed Challenge:

- Equally balance the main emphasis of the campaign's content plan between direct marketing (product and service messaging) and sales promotion (promotional campaign) messaging. Hybrid messaging between direct marketing and sales promotion could be utilised, but the focus should be on direct marketing.
- Advertised messaging should include mostly forms of product and service messaging.
- Unplanned personal selling opportunities should be incorporated and utilised during the campaign.

Once again, the campaign was launched in co-operation with one of Acer's business partners, namely FNB banking. FNB supplies Acer devices as a reseller at discounted monthly rates to their clients. The campaign also has the aim of promoting both the partnership between Acer and FNB, as well as the discounted product deals available through FNB, as already discussed as the main imperative campaign aim of generating sales. Where there was, however, a considerable amount of isolated focus observed on the partner brand during the Space Renewed Challenge, the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 campaign only intended to promote the partnership between the two brands and therefore communicated messaging directly relevant to the partnership between the two brands. Messaging that emphasised the partner alone was therefore much less prominent than was the case with the Space Renewed Challenge. Taking the above into consideration, the suggestion proposed regarding partnership messaging for the Space Renewed Challenge was transferred, but slightly adapted to fit the new campaign circumstances:

- Ensure a fair amount of public relations representation by including messaging directly related to the partnership between Acer and FNB. Isolated partner messaging can be kept to a minimum.

Furthermore, the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 Campaign also had the aim of growing the Acer Africa social networking audience, as was the case with the Space Renewed Challenge. As this aim was similar to the parallel aim from the Space Renewed Challenge, the relevant suggestion from the Space Renewed Challenge was directly transferred:

- Whilst advertising must focus on product and service sub-category messaging, it was suggested that all forms of advertising sub category messaging be included.
- Unrelated messaging should also be well represented with regards to amount and diversity of sub-categories.

Lastly, it was also noted that Acer's global strategy and vision had remained unchanged since the Space Renewed Challenge was planned and implemented. This therefore infers that the social networking messaging suggestions made regarding the Acer global strategy of 'maintaining and increasing its position as one of the world's biggest lifestyle device providers', as well as 'Positioning Acer as an innovative and forward-thinking leader in the technological industry as a whole' (see section 4.6.1) were wholly transferrable to the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 Campaign. Taking this into consideration, the following unique suggestion was added to the existing list of recommended actions:

- Brand messaging should be well represented with concerns to both diversity and quantity in order to promote the Acer brand in its entirety.

With the above pre-emptive analysis of the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 Campaign taken into consideration, the following summarised list of actions was suggested for the campaign's social networking messaging:

- An equal balance of product and service messaging and promotional campaign messaging by means of separate category or cross-category (hybrid) messaging should be present.
- Advertised messaging should be included, but primarily related to the messaging sub-category of product and service. At least one form of every other sub-category should also be present.
- Brand messaging should be well represented regarding both diversity and quantity, but with the main focus being on the FNB and Acer partnership.
- Opportunities for personal selling must be identified and utilised.
- Adequate representation in unrelated messaging with regards to both quantity and diversity should be present.

6.5 Action planning: the formulation of a new social networking messaging plan

With the campaign diagnosed with regards to the formulation of a series of proposed strategic messaging suggestions, the suggestions were then converted into a strategic messaging plan of specific, quantifiable and actionable elements for Acer's social networking platforms during the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 Campaign.

Taking into consideration that the researcher typically schedules two posts per working day on a managed social networking brand account²¹, 60 posts were scheduled during the campaign period of 1

²¹ This practice is once again part of the researcher's personal formulaic approach to the implementation of social networking practice as a social networking manager. The two posts per day structure is regarded by the researcher (in his degree as an experienced social networking manager) as the norm when planning social networking messaging content plans.

October 2012 to 2 November 2012. Noting pre and post campaign messaging, the relevant overall messaging time period was extended to 3 working days before the campaign and 2 working days after the campaign²². This consideration brought the sum total of messaging slots to a finalised total of 60 posts, between the dates of 26 September 2012 and 6 November 2012.

With the total amount of messaging slots available during the campaign time period confirmed, the specific amount of messaging slots assigned to each of the marketing communications mix disciplines was determined, based on the diagnosis suggestions previously formulated. The following strategic slot assignment framework was suggested for both social networking platforms (Facebook and Twitter), according to the main categories of social networking messaging and their sub-categories:

1. Promotional campaign messaging (16 messages)

- **Promotional (6)**
- **Administrative (0)**²³
- **Pre & post (3)**
- **External (0)**²⁴
- **Tie-in (2)**
- **Indirect (6)**

2. Product & Service messaging (16 messages)

- **Promotional (6)**
- **Supportive (2)**
- **Third party (3)**
- **Tie-in (3)**
- **Indirect (2)**

3. Brand messaging (16 messages)

²² An additional day was included for a pre campaign messaging slot in order to ensure Acer's social networking audience are given adequate time to prepare and take note of the campaign's launch on 1 October 2012.

²³ Unlike Acer's Space Renewed challenge, the Acer & FNB October 2012 Joint campaign had no competition element, which resulted in their being no need for administrative messaging updates.

²⁴ No external promotional campaign messaging is included, as the main focus of the campaign is the Acer & FNB joint October 2012 Campaign.

- **Brand Identity (6)**
- **Internal (1)²⁵**
- **Partnership & Sponsorship (6)**
- **Cross platform (1)**
- **Third-party (1)**
- **Tie-in (1)**
- **Indirect (1)**

4. Unrelated messaging (10 messages)²⁶

- **Informative (2)**
- **Timely (2)**
- **Member-centric (2)**
- **Engaging/Viral (2)**
- **Sponsored (2)**

6. Advertised messaging (6 ads sets - excluded)²⁷

- **Campaign (2 ads)**
- **Product & Service (2 ads)**
- **Brand (1 ads)**
- **Unrelated (1 ads)**

6. Direct messaging (All unplanned opportunities must be utilised)

7. Hybrid messaging (6 messages)

- **Product & Service/Promotional Campaign (3)**
- **Brand/Product & Service (2)**

²⁵ A minimal amount of internal brand messaging would be included as the research/social networking manager had limited access to content related to the internal identity of Acer.

²⁶ The lesser amount of unrelated messaging (compared to, product & service, brand and promotional campaign messaging) was justified by the reasoning that growing the social networking audience base of the Acer Africa social networking accounts was a secondary objective in relation to the primary objectives of positioning Acer as a leader in the technology industry and increasing awareness levels of Acer product offerings.

²⁷ Advertised messaging does not form part of the social networking content schedule of the brand, as these were run via the social networking platform's separate paid advertising system.

This messaging allocation is now presented diagrammatically.:

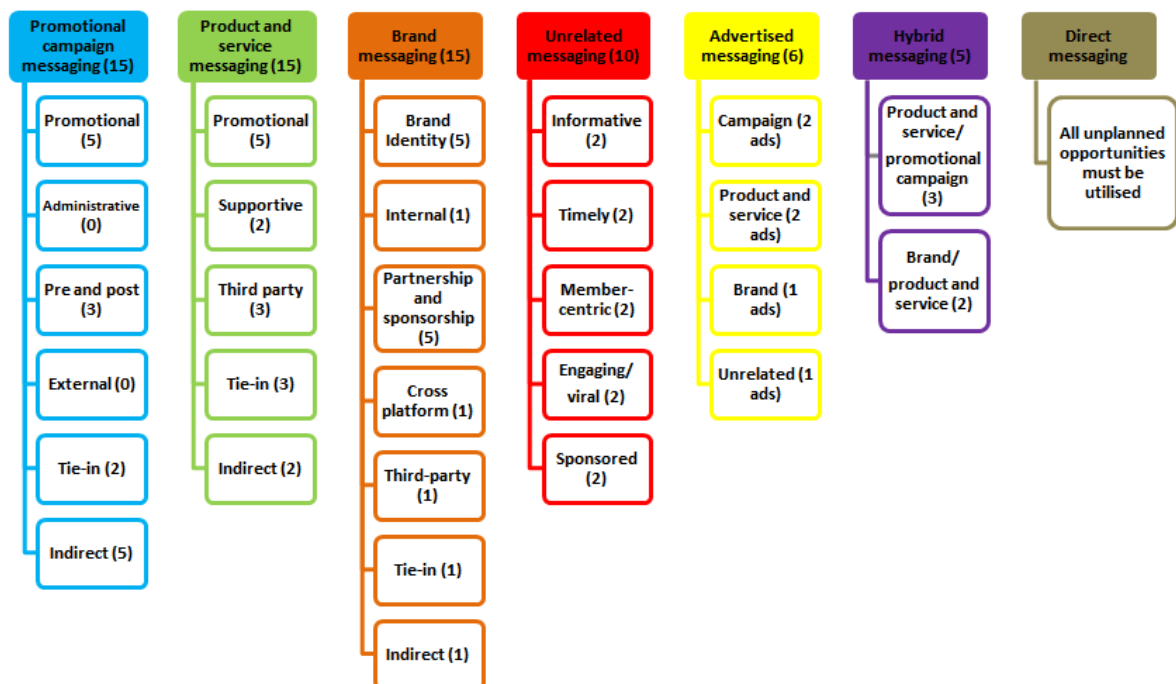


Figure 6.1: The proposed messaging allocation per typical social networking messaging category and sub-category

With the practical assignment of messaging slots laid out, the messaging framework for the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 campaign was laid out as figure 6.2:

ACTION	Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4		Week 5		Week 6		Week 7	
	Date		Mon 1 OCTOBER		Mon 8 OCTOBER		Mon 15 OCTOBER		Mon 22 OCTOBER		Mon 29 OCTOBER		Mon 5 NOVEMBER	
TYPE OF POST			TIE-IN		PROMOTIONAL		INDIRECT		PROMOTIONAL		PROMOTIONAL		TIE-IN	
TYPE OF POST			TIE-IN		THIRD PARTY		INDIRECT		BRAND IDENTITY		ENGAGING/VIRAL		BRAND IDENTITY	
Date			Tues 2 OCTOBER		Tues 9 OCTOBER		Tues 16 OCTOBER		Tues 23 OCTOBER		Tues 30 OCTOBER		Tues 6 NOVEMBER	
TYPE OF POST			INFORMATIVE		ENGAGING/VIRAL		PROMOTIONAL		INDIRECT		PARTNERSHIP		POST	
TYPE OF POST			BRAND IDENTITY		CROSS PLATFORM		PARTNERSHIP		SPONSORED		PROMOTIONAL		INFORMATIVE	
Date			Wed 3 OCTOBER		Wed 10 OCTOBER		Wed 17 OCTOBER		Wed 24 OCTOBER		Wed 31 OCTOBER			
TYPE OF POST			BRAND/PRODUCT		SUPPORTIVE		MEMBER-CENTRIC		PROMOTIONAL		TIMELY			
TYPE OF POST			PROMOTIONAL		PRODUCT/CAMPAIGN		PROMOTIONAL		THIRD PARTY		TIE-IN			
Date			Thur 4 OCTOBER		Thur 11 OCTOBER		Thur 18 OCTOBER		Thur 25 OCTOBER		Thur 1 NOVEMBER			
TYPE OF POST			TIMELY		PARTNERSHIP		BRAND/PRODUCT		INDIRECT		PRODUCT/CAMPAIGN			
TYPE OF POST			PARTNERSHIP		SPONSORED		TIE-IN		PARTNERSHIP		SUPPORTIVE			
Date			Fri 5 OCTOBER		Fri 12 OCTOBER		Fri 19 OCTOBER		Fri 26 OCTOBER		Fri 2 NOVEMBER			
TYPE OF POST			MEMBER-CENTRIC		INDIRECT		BRAND IDENTITY		PRODUCT/CAMPAIGN		INDIRECT			
TYPE OF POST			PROMOTIONAL		TIE-IN		INDIRECT		THIRD PARTY		INDIRECT			
Date			Fri 28 SEPTEMBER											
TYPE OF POST			INTERNAL											

Legend	
■	Promotional Campaign
■	Product & Service
■	Brand
■	Unrelated
■	Hybrid

Figure 6.2: The suggested structuring of the social networking messaging content plan for the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 campaign. This was based on the study's proposed model for strategically managing professional social networking.

A few observations regarding this proposed content plan were made as follows:

- Weekends were omitted from the messaging plan. Weekend scheduling could have been incorporated if new circumstances, such as changes in campaign objectives arose that required the inclusion of additional messaging slots.
- The social networking manager opted to reduce the amount of Twitter messages transmitted during the campaign time period to 60% of the amount of messages transmitted on the Acer Facebook page. It was decided that Acer's Facebook page would be the most effective platform from which to drive the campaign and its most important elements, justifying the decision to focus Acer's social networking initiatives on this platform. Even though the message quantity was reduced on Twitter, the social networking manager still utilised the original messaging content plan and posted only the most crucial messages each week.
- The exact time of day when each message was to be transmitted was purposely excluded from the content plan. It is the researcher's opinion as social networking manager that one post can be transmitted during the morning working hours and that the other can be transmitted during the afternoon working hours. This is a generalisation of social networking industry practice and an analysis of posting timeframes might reveal more specific timing to be beneficial to Acer's social networking strategy.
- The logical ordering of the content plan was based on the researcher's own presupposition concerning social networking planning, which was that the same messaging types should not ideally follow directly after each other and that each 6 day period should be regarded as a combined message set that should incorporate all of the main messaging types identified. The researcher believes that this served to balance the content plan and ensured that the social networking audience members did not get exposed to a series of similar messages in a short period of time. This was seen as a necessary precaution, seeing that social networking audience members could experience repetitive messaging unfavourably, which could lead to damage in brand image and loyalty.
- Whilst advertised messaging and direct messaging was excluded from the proposed content schedule, the researcher notes that these elements were indeed taken into consideration during the course of the campaign. Direct messaging instances were utilised as far as possible by the

researcher to induce additional sales. Advertised messaging was also incorporated in the form of Facebook marketplace ads in order to increase the reach of the campaign significantly.

6.6 Action taking: the implementation of the new content strategy

The newly strategised social networking messaging plan was approved by Acer and the content plan was implemented as scheduled, with certain alterations required due to numerous reasons. A weekly breakdown of the content implementation and highlights are now presented:

Week 1

During week 1, the messaging centred on promoting product and service, promotional campaign and brand related properties, as advised by the schedule. As no relevant internal messaging could be sourced for Friday, 28 September 2012, this messaging slot was removed. A brand identity message was furthermore replaced with a brand partnership message, promoting the longstanding Acer and Microsoft partnership. Whilst this was not a critical strategy of the campaign, it was included as a mechanism for building hype around a joint campaign of Acer and Microsoft for December 2012. A third party product and service message was also moved to week 2 due to a special message timing request from Acer's public relations agency.

What happens when you stick a jet rocket to the powerful Ultrabook S5? Find out here: <http://aspires5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA/>



Image 6.1: A scheduled, promotional product & service message that was posted on 26 September 2012 on Facebook. It was the only product & service message during week 1, as the third party product and service message of week 1 was moved to week 2.

Week 2

With less deviations from the content messaging strategy than in week 1, week 2 focussed on promoting the Acer brand, Acer products and Acer partnerships. As scheduled, there was also a significant focus on unrelated messaging that was well received by the Acer social networking audience. A third-party Acer product review was, however, slotted in and replaced a promotional campaign message on 1 October 2012. The update that received the highest level of fan engagement was a product tie-in message on Facebook, transmitted on 1 October 2012. Both of the unrelated messages were also well received.



Image 6.2: A third party product and service message posted on 1 October 2012 on Twitter. This message was moved over from week 1's messaging schedule.

Week 3

An urgent brand partnership message needed to be transmitted at the start of the week, which replaced a promotional campaign tie-in message. Reviewing the schedule, the researcher noticed that certain necessary alterations had led to an imbalance and that more campaign related messaging was needed in order to enhance the representation of promotional campaign messaging. To address this imbalance, a directly promotional, promotional campaign message was transmitted on 11 October 2012. This was needed to ensure that the FNB product deals were adequately promoted via Acer's social networking channels. A supportive product and service message was moved to week 6 due to a lack of messaging

content at that point in time. A third-party product and service message received a high level of engagement on Facebook.

Did you know that you can buy Acer products at reduced rates from FNB?



Image 6.3: A promotional campaign message posted on 11 October 2012 on Facebook. This message was insisted upon by the researcher in order to ensure balance of the week's messaging schedule, caused by unplanned, but required revisions to the schedule.

Week 4

During week 4, content had to be re-organised in order to accommodate messaging centred on the imminent release of Windows 8, Microsoft's latest operating system – this was included in the form of brand partnership messaging. Breaking news of Acer being named the number one supplier of notebooks across Europe, Middle East and Africa also resulted in messaging slots being reassigned. The researcher did, however, still manage to maintain the week's intended focus on products and services even with all the above-mentioned unforeseen messaging. A planned promotional product and service message on 16 October 2012 on Facebook received high engagement levels.

Are you ready for Windows 8?

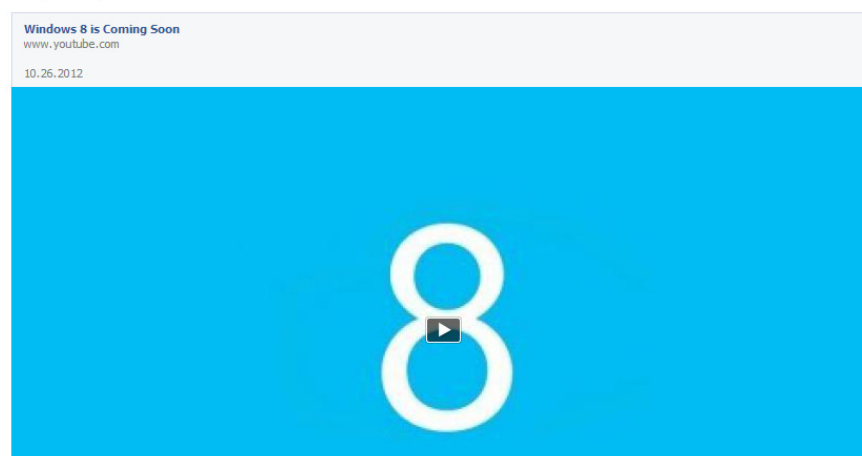


Image 6.4: An unplanned brand partnership message posted on 16 October 2012 on Facebook. This message was requested in order to promote the imminent release of Windows 8, Microsoft's latest operating system.

Week 6

Yet another important unplanned event had to be included in this week's schedule, namely the launch of the Acer and Orlando Pirates Learning Centre. Two posts had to be replaced in order to accommodate messages that promoted and increased awareness amongst Acer social networking fans with regards to the Acer and Orlando Pirates Learning Centre. As was the case during week 4, messaging slots had to also be reserved for the promotion of Windows 8. Nevertheless, the researcher managed to maintain the week's intended focus on brand messaging and product and service messaging. A rescheduled promotional campaign message on 23 October 2012 on Facebook received high engagement rates and a supportive product and service message, scheduled for week 3 was transmitted here as content could finally be sourced for this messaging.

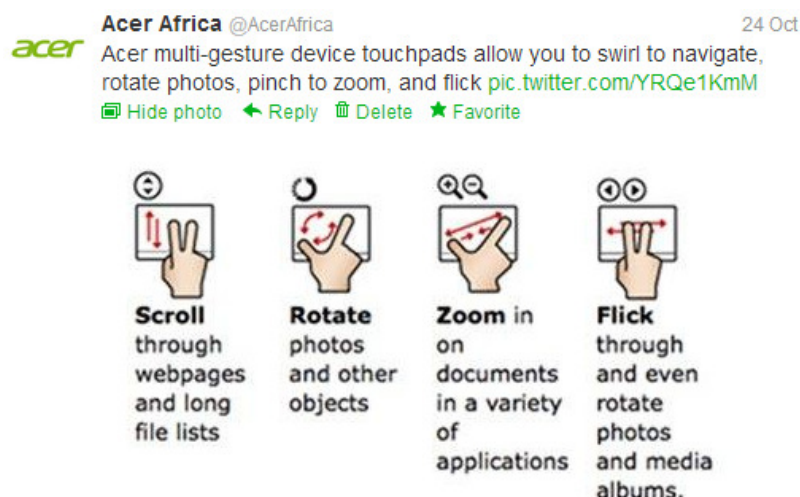


Image 6.5: A rescheduled supportive product and service message posted on 24 October 2012 on Twitter. This message was originally intended for week 3 of the campaign, but was moved due to a lack of content in week 6.

Week 7

Two major events disrupted the transmission of messaging as per the message planning schedule during week 6. Firstly, the launch of the brand new Acer website and secondly, the launch of a new global Acer product campaign, in partnership with Hollywood actress, Megan Fox. Because of the sheer magnitude of messaging that had to be accommodated, the researcher noted that he was unable to maintain the scheduled posting plan for this penultimate week of the campaign. The transmitting of the two

scheduled unrelated posts were, however, insisted upon by the researcher, as the considerable amount of brand, as well as product and service messaging would have caused a serious imbalance if these were not accompanied by some examples of unrelated messaging.



Image 6.6: A cover pic updated on the Acer Facebook page on 30 October 2012. The cover pic promotes Acer's product campaign with Hollywood actress, Megan Fox.

Week 7

During the final two days of the campaign, it was requested that the researcher promote sections from the new Acer website via messaging on the social networking channels. The researcher was, however, permitted to post a member-centric message in order to maintain a sense of balance.

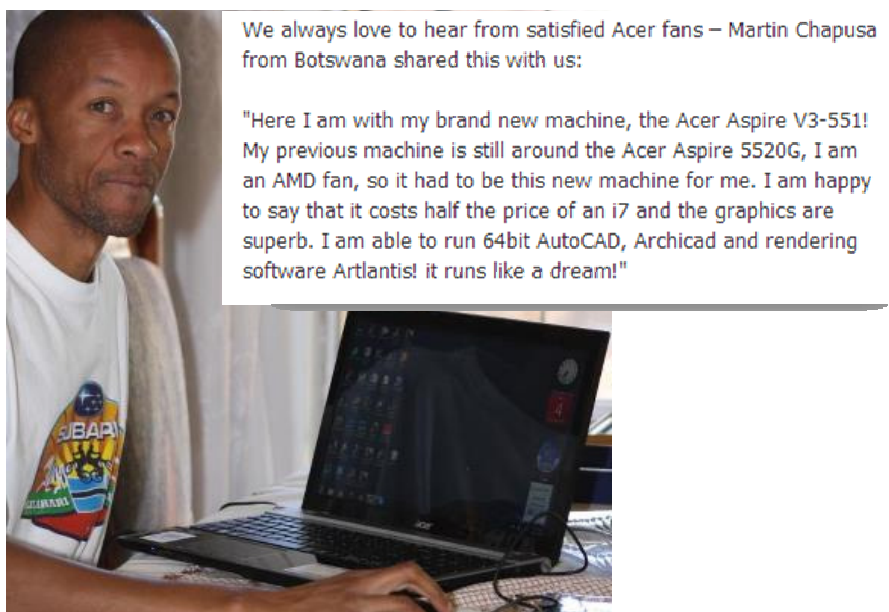


Image 6.7: An unrelated member-centric message posted on 6 November 2012 on Facebook. The message was posted in a final attempt to create balance during the final week of the campaign.

The above section has detailed the most noteworthy alterations and consistencies of the implemented campaign messaging plan, as proposed during the action planning phase that preceded it. In general, it was observed that although numerous alterations were required by the researcher during the campaign's duration, the necessary measures were taken in order to ensure that a messaging balance be maintained throughout the campaign.

6.7 Evaluating: the impact of the new content strategy

The following observations were made with regards to the positive and the negative impact of the newly implemented social networking messaging plan for Acer:

The study predominantly focussed on the level to which the model can be used to strategically align Acer's social networking messaging and not on the effectiveness of the model as measured via typical social networking success metrics (see section 1.9). A superficial observation regarding social networking messaging engagement levels is however included to illustrate the all-encompassing effect of the new social networking messaging strategy. In light of this, the researcher notes that the content received positive responses and a high level of feedback from users in general.

Complete the following: The best aspect of Acer's Ultrabook range is _____.



Image 6.8: An effective²⁸ promotional product and service update made on the Acer Facebook page on 16 October 2012. The update received 60 likes, 30 comments and 2 shares. When compared to previous

²⁸ Effectiveness is used here to relate to the overall reception of the message by the social networking audience. A message that receives a high amount of positive feedback from audience members can be perceived as an effective message. Messaging that result in more negative sentiment than positive sentiment can be regarded as ineffective message. This contextualisation of effectiveness within a social networking framework is based on the researchers own opinion as an experienced social networking manager.

engagement results of posts before the new content strategy was implemented, this was concluded to be a respectable increase in terms of post engagement levels.

With regards to the sales imperative of the campaign, the researcher noted that it was highly challenging to equate social networking initiatives to an increase or decrease in sales (see section 2.7). Regardless of this, it was noted that the devices that were promoted during the campaign time period received positive sales numbers during October 2012. Social networking and e-commerce integration would be required in order to assess if the positive sales results were in any degree associated with the social networking messaging plan. It can, however, be confirmed that awareness of product offerings were created, as Acer's social networking audience members were presented with messaging about these products during the campaign time period.

The content plan's focus on strategic considerations such as product awareness instilled the organisation's social networking initiatives with a sense of credibility, similar to that of other modern and more traditional marketing initiatives of the organisation that also centred on reaching certain marketing objectives. The messaging plan also gave the social networking manager a higher sense of credibility in general, as the model's classification of social networking messaging types was based on modern marketing theory and practice, sprouting from traditional marketing roots. The social networking manager could therefore justify his social networking messaging decisions, referencing a dependable model of marketing principles. This also accentuated the degree to which social networking initiatives could support and complement other marketing initiatives of the organisation.

From a planning perspective, the researcher made the general observation that the proposed messaging structure served as a useful benchmark and reference point for the formulation of a strategically balanced social networking messaging plan. The content plan also made the social networking manager more efficient in general, as time spent sourcing and writing unnecessary content was minimised. The researcher noted, though, that instances arose which resulted in necessary deviations from the content plan. Because the new content strategy was, however, regarded as an adaptable messaging guideline, the unplanned updates could be added to the social networking messaging schedule without any concerns from Acer or the social networking manager himself. As the social networking messaging was structured according to a dependable reference point of strategic considerations, this ensured that sudden necessary changes did not affect the strategic value of the content plan. If changes were made, the model necessitates inventory to be rebalanced in order to ensure the content plan was still aligned with strategic imperatives. This process did, however, prove to be relatively time consuming, as the messaging plan needed to be restructured in order to reflect the change and ensure that the content plan was still aligned with campaign and organisational objectives.

We are very excited today as we are launching the first ever Orlando Pirates Learning Centre, supported by Acer for Education – more pics to follow soon...

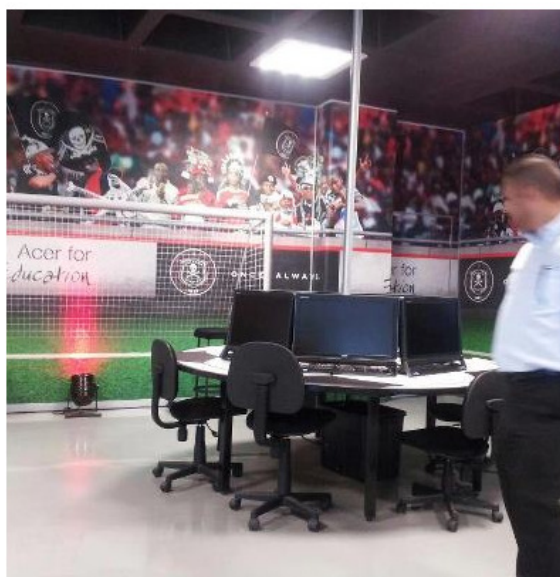


Image 6.9: An unplanned events related update made on the Acer Africa Facebook page on 18 October. The PR event was only brought to the attention of the social networking manager on the day of the event and could not therefore be included in the original social networking content schedule.

Noting a disadvantage, the use of a more formal framework for social networking initiatives partially hampered the level of creativity by which the social networking manager approached his social networking initiatives. As the social networking manager had a content guide that had to be referenced throughout the campaign time period, it was noted that the social networking manager was restricted with concerns to the range of topics that could be transmitted. Nevertheless, there was room for some creativity within the framework of the messaging plan, even though certain restrictions existed. The inclusion of unrelated messaging types as a main consideration provided the opportunity to implement fresh and unexpected messaging with no direct relation to Acer the brand or its products.

Are you ready for the weekend of weekends for all true South African geeks? The annual rAge Expo kicks off tomorrow and we have to admit we're very excited! What's your favourite LAN PC game and why?

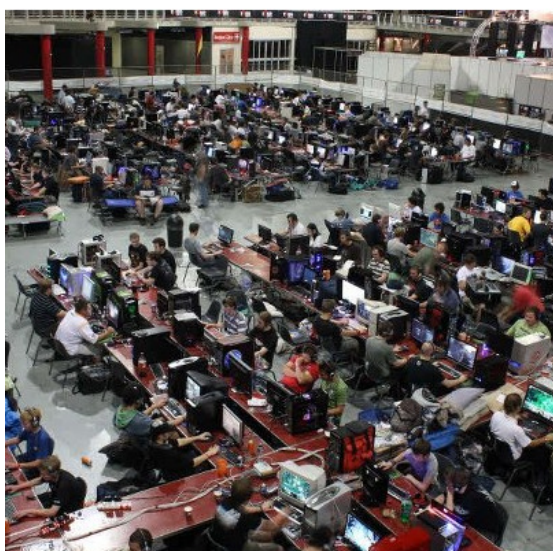


Image 6.10: An update transmitted on the Acer Facebook page on 4 October. As a timely, unrelated message, this update concerning the rAge computing event was well received by Acer Facebook audience members and helped to diversify the page's messaging topics.

The process of defining social networking messaging types into categories simplified the process of balancing the content schedule, as the clearly defined categories of message types caused imbalances that were clearly visible. Therefore, the researcher could most certainly prevent such imbalances from occurring, therefore preventing the development of negative brand perceptions that could be caused by this. The categorisation of the main categories into more distinguished sub-categories served to advance the balancing process to an additional extent, as finer nuances within categories were also taken into consideration, ensuring that the entire topic inventory of the campaign could be represented to a balanced degree. This categorisation also accentuated the functional traits of each message type, rather than focussing on the more superficial characteristics of messaging, such as structural traits (example, the way in which a message is worded). This made the social networking manager more aware of the effects and purpose of different messaging types, resulting in the social networking manager being able to make more informed decisions regarding the messaging formulation in general as the user can consider the functional aspect of a message during the decision making process.

Whilst the model took established marketing principles into consideration, it did not do so at the expense of inherent social networking traits. Aspects unique to social networking platforms and the way social networking users interact on such platforms were also taken into consideration and were included as pertinent considerations. An example of this is the sub-categories of tie-in and indirect messaging that acknowledged specific trends in the way in which social networking messages are formulated in order to not promote the brand and its products too aggressively or repeatedly.

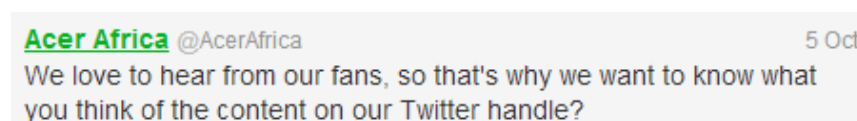


Image 6.11: A member-centric unrelated message posted on 6 October. This is another example that illustrates how the messaging plan accommodates unique aspects of social networking messaging.

Another shortcoming of the messaging plan, the content plan, did not represent all five of the marketing communications mix disciplines as a fully integrated marketing inventory on social networking platforms, as the disciplines of personal selling and advertising were considered to be partially isolated disciplines. Whilst advertised messaging was regarded as a separate consideration not included in the structured content plan due to its technical nature, the sub-categorisation of advertised messaging did serve as a dependable reference from which to strategically plan all paid initiatives on social networking

platforms. Whilst the messaging plan also did not accommodate the personal selling discipline of the marketing communications mix to the same extent as the other four disciplines due to the unplanned nature of the discipline, it does note the importance of this discipline as a crucial consideration that social networking managers need to be aware of in the day-to-day management of social networking brand accounts.

6.8 Specify learning: the lessons learnt from the new content strategy

With an evaluation of the implementation of the strategic messaging structure undertaken, the conclusions drawn from this analysis were detailed. During the final phase of the action research, the researcher gathered the following insights resulting from the evaluation phase:

Whilst the model was shown to be a helpful guideline by which to plan and implement social networking messaging strategically, the model's implementation accentuated certain shortcomings that needed to be assessed and taken into consideration.

The model was shown to have certain limitations with regards to the accommodation of all marketing communications mix disciplines, as the marketing communications mix disciplines of personal selling and advertising were not directly incorporated into the social networking messaging framework proposed by the model. Nevertheless, the model included broad considerations regarding the implementation of all marketing communications disciplines.

The implementation of the model also showed that the process of measuring the success of marketing initiatives is complex and that aligning social networking initiatives with dependable marketing disciplines does not necessarily ease the process of assessing the success of social networking initiatives. When measuring the effectiveness of social networking initiatives, the inherent traits of social networking platforms and the interaction habits of audience members should always be considered. Traditional metrics should only be included if and when directly proven to be relevant.

Furthermore, the model could also potentially complicate the social networking manager's responsibilities, as the model necessitates that content be re-aligned in circumstances where messaging deviations create imbalances to the messaging focus. The model should always be implemented with the intention of supporting the social networking manager. When the model is found to be detrimental to the process of content sourcing and creation, it must be applied less restrictively, taking into consideration that this could affect the level to which the social networking messaging plan is strategically aligned.

The issue of social networking creativity was also brought to light, illustrating that the model could potentially hamper the level of creativity by which social networking managers approach their content

sourcing and content creation. In light of this, it is noted that the model is most ideally suited as an overarching guideline or framework for the type of content that should be communicated within a specific campaign time period in order for social networking messaging to be strategically aligned. The model should not be applied to the strict extent that it hampers the creativity of the social networking manager and marketing team – social networking managers should still have the opportunity to utilise their creative possibilities within the framework of the model.

The model must always be regarded as a dynamic, highly adaptable framework that can be changed in order to align with the fast changing marketing and social networking situation at hand. The unique circumstances of a social networking audience should always be considered when implementing the model. The social networking manager must assess the social networking audience members' reactions to certain message strategies and use these insights to inform possible alterations to the model framework.

From the above discussion it was concluded that the model proposed in this study should be regarded as an adaptable, guiding framework by which professional social networking initiatives can be strategically planned and implemented.

As the model was shown to be most useful when applied as a highly adaptable framework for social networking initiatives, it stands to reason that another cycle of the action research phases would only have refined the model to a further extent, adding to its rigidity and the complexity of its application. Taking this into consideration, the researcher declared the action research process as finalised.

6.9 Conclusion

With the theoretical pairing of social networking activities and the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix explored, the study attempted to illustrate how this pairing could be utilised as a practical guideline for the strategic implementation of marketing communications mix disciplines. This was done through the empirical research method of action research: Firstly, the original sampling source was diagnosed with concerns to the representation of social networking messaging categories and the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix. Secondly, the theoretical considerations for implementing marketing communications mix disciplines (as discussed in Chapter 3) were then referenced in order to propose a set of actions to strategically align the original sampling source. Thirdly, the suggestions proposed were aligned with a new sampling source, the Acer and FNB joint October 2012 Campaign and initiated in order to determine the suggestions' practical applicability. Fourthly, the actions taken were evaluated with regards to their benefits and shortcomings. Finally, from this

evaluation arose a series of insights on how the paring of social networking messaging with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix can be used as an adaptable guideline for the strategic implementation of professional social networking. The completion of this process led to the addressing of the final research question, namely:

RQ5. What will a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented entail?

With all of the study's research questions explored, the final chapter will summarise the study's findings, illustrate how the overall problem statement of the study was approached and assess to which degree each of the study's main research questions were answered.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the empirical research process of the study was outlined, described and practically implemented. In this chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the key findings from the literature study in Chapter 2 and 3, as well as empirical research process, as detailed in Chapters 5 and 6. The shortcomings of the study will also be listed and suggestions for future studies provided. Finally, recommendations will be made regarding the strategic implementation of marketing communications within a professional social networking context. This final chapter will aim to answer the study's general research question, namely:

How can the principles of marketing communications be strategically implemented within a social networking communication context?

7.2 Answering the research questions

During Chapter 1, each of the study's research objectives were linked to a specific research question that was used to guide and contextualise the study throughout. Answering the study's research questions in this section will therefore simultaneously address each of the research objectives and indicate how they were achieved. This will ultimately lead to the answering of the main research question.

7.2.1 The developing field of professional social networking

The inclusion of Chapter 2 was substantiated from the following guiding argument of the study: Without understanding the inherent qualities of a specific communication medium/platform, marketing practitioners will not be able to use these mediums effectively (McLuhan, 1974:8). This chapter substantiated the following main arguments of the study, namely:

- The use of social networking as a business tool allows organisations to accomplish their marketing goals more effectively.
- Social networking initiatives need to be organised according to a well thought-out social networking strategy for best results.

More importantly however, Chapter 2 addressed research question 1 of the study, namely:

RQ1.What are the characteristics, benefits and potential pitfalls of professional social networking and how did this field develop theoretically?

To answer this question, the chapter explored the literature available on the developing marketing field of professional networking. This also ensured the necessary contextualisation to the study's later chapters. To provide an adequate answer to the above mentioned research question, Chapter 2 discussed professional social networking with regards to the following aspects: The characteristics of social networking and some of its most prominent platforms; the rise of social networking as a professional marketing field; the influence of social networking as a professional marketing tool; the organisational benefits of social networking, as well as the possible pitfalls that need to be considered when adopting a social networking strategy. From this exploration, the following series of theoretical conclusions were drawn and served as an answer to the first research question:

Firstly, the Web 2.0 roots of social networking accentuated how crucial the principle of content, as well as the sharing of that content. The web has evolved from a mere static space for presenting information to a dynamic information hub where participants are encouraged to co-create content, leading to boundless potential for new content generation. Whilst an organisation can guide conversations on these platforms to a certain extent, the flow of information is by no means governed by the organisation. Organisations need to connect on a human level when conversing with their customers and need to be highly dedicated to each and every conversation instance if they are to have any hope of changing perceptions, building trust and long term relationships with their community of consumers. All of this accentuates the reciprocal nature of social networking and shows how it should be a crucial building block of any social networking marketing strategy. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2A

Functioning within a Web 2.0 framework, social networking platforms and the social networking processes undertaken on them form a flexible online community, where infinite conversations centred on co-created and user-generated content take place in order to connect with like-minded individuals.

There are distinct similarities between the world's most prominent social networking platforms, with one of the most visible being the sharing of content amongst its users, whether it be between consumers themselves or the organisation and its social networking community. This mutual trait echoes the findings during the initial exploration of social networking in its entirety, signifying the

importance of this aspect even further. These platforms do, however, have specific differences and an understanding of these differences is crucial to effectively utilise each social networking platform. As the world's biggest social networking platform, Facebook has a wide range of aspects specifically developed with organisational communication and marketing in mind. On each of the 160 million plus Facebook business pages (see section 2.3.1), organisations are presented with a variety of avenues and opportunities to communicate their ideas and market themselves, as well as their products. On the other hand, Twitter tends to keep to its more simple, streamlined approach, focussing on conveying topical and newsworthy content that elicits conversations amongst its users. Each platform has a commendable variety of opportunities for the generation of discernible marketing results – organisations simply need to play to the strengths of each platform for optimum utilisation of each social networking platform. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2B

Two of the world's most prevalent social networking platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter consist of distinguishing traits such as the inherent functionality of each; difference in metrics for success; the respective business applications and the level of anonymity users can maintain on these platforms.

With regards to the evolution of the field, the theory suggested that social networking platforms and their variety of applications have undergone a dramatic spike with regards to prominence and the size of user numbers. Numerous reasons are provided as explanation of social networking's exponential rise, but in general, authors agree that social networking's rise is directly linked to the adaptability and multi-functionality of the social networking platforms. It provides organisations with the tools to develop and grow their business on cost-effective platforms that provide a magnitude of different options for marketing communications. It is easier than ever before for organisations to enter new geographical and financial markets and nurture long-term relationships with customers that were previously inaccessible. The prominence of social networking in South Africa was also confirmed, noting that approximately 91% of South Africans now have a Facebook account (see section 2.4.2). Not only do South Africans have a social networking presence, but they also spend a considerable time on these platforms in order to grow and nurture their own social networking connections and relationships. With this in mind, it becomes evident that there is more than enough reason for South African organisations to build their own social

networking empires. By being active on these platforms, gives them access to the largest possible percentage of South African consumers. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2C

Social networking has gained increasing prominence during the last few years, internationally, as well as in South Africa due to the following reasons: It gives users the ability to converse both real-time and asynchronously; industry competition; strategic need to penetrate new markets and the cost-effectiveness of social networking marketing.

Concentrating on the impact of social networking, it has been established that the field has had a considerable influence on marketing in that it has widened the scope of marketing communications considerably. Referring back once again to the Web 2.0 roots of social networking, the co-creation characteristic of social networking has led to marketing communications becoming democratised. The authority of communication has now shifted from the organisation and now firmly rests with the consumer. The consumer now has the power to voice their opinion in such a way that it spreads across the globe, influencing both friends and strangers alike on a large scale. This shift has put marketers in a precarious situation, as messages can no longer merely be pushed out, one after the other. Marketers need to actively participate and listen to the needs and opinions of their customers and adapt their messaging strategy accordingly. Another crucial change is that traditional marketing methods and platforms have lost a considerable amount of ground to social networking, as many consumers now regard social networking as their preferred channel for conversing with organisations and the rest of the world. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2D

Social networking has enhanced the scope of marketing communications and requires marketers to take a participatory and indirect approach to their marketing initiatives. With a multitude of new platforms available for initiating conversations with brands on an intimate and equal level, customers now enjoy more power within the communication hierarchy.

It was also found that active organisational social networking participation can lead to a multitude of advantages. Referring back to social networking's inherent affinity with the development of relationships, it is the ideal channel for the nurturing of interactions with existing customers, as well as the development of new long-term relationships with an untapped customer base. Social networking's focus on highly targeted communications and active listening imbues it with the quality of being highly efficient as an avenue from which to gain exceptional insights into a consumer's preferences and opinions, making it possible for an organisation to initiate in-depth marketing research. The co-creation quality of social networking is once again relevant, as it is noted that social networking creates the ideal opportunity for the creation of rich content that can be utilised by an organisation to great effect. And finally, even though social networking has been shown to have diluted the audience of more traditional marketing channels, it is however noted that social networking can also be utilised in order to complement the messaging and marketing initiatives of other marketing channels. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2E

Social networking bears a multitude of benefits from an organisational perspective that include: The building of relationships with new and existing clients and employees and partners; the specification of the messaging audience for highly targeted communications; the creation of rich, conversational content; targeted market research; active brand management; the support of other digital marketing mediums and so forth.
communication hierarchy.

Even though the exploration of professional social networking highlighted the magnitude of benefits to be gained from active social networking participation, there are certain potential pitfalls linked to social networking. Organisations need to be fully aware of these dangers as they could have detrimental repercussions to an organisation that blindly leaps into formal social networking participation. One of the most prominent pitfalls is an obstacle that has haunted social networking practice since its initial rise to popularity, namely the fact that marketers find it difficult to clearly convert their social networking efforts into tangible and measurable marketing results. Marketers need to find creative, but effective ways of translating their social networking actions into real sales increases for the organisation. Part of the problem is that social networking has yet to be contextualised within a dependable and modern marketing framework that can be utilised to frame social networking initiatives within a setting that is familiar to business leaders and their shareholders. In line with this, social networking authors stress the

importance of a strategic approach to social networking that is integrated with both traditional, as well as other modern marketing practices. It is from this central hurdle in the world of social networking that the study's general problem statement sprouts. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 2F

Even though there are numerous benefits to be gained from social networking initiatives, organisations can damage their brand and reputation severely if these channels are not used soundly. Hindrances to social networking's general acceptance as a marketing tool include the fact that it is still difficult to measure the success of social networking campaigns and the necessity for a high level of organisational commitment and a highly strategic approach.

7.2.2 Marketing communications and the disciplines of the marketing communications mix

Chapter 3 focussed on the theoretical marketing framework of the study, namely marketing communications. As noted in one of the study's guiding arguments, professional social networking should be integrated with traditional marketing efforts to ensure the best marketing results (see section 1.7). In light of this, the modern marketing movement of marketing communications was explored as a viable framework for integrating professional social networking actions with traditional marketing disciplines. Chapter 3 focussed on answering research question 2:

RQ2. What are the theoretical characteristics of each of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix?

As contextualisation to the process of addressing this question, traditional marketing theory was discussed, as well as the evolution of marketing theory from these traditional beginnings to modern movements such as marketing communications. The inherent link between social networking and relationship marketing was then noted as further confirmation of social networking's theoretical applicability. Thereafter, the marketing philosophy of marketing communications was explored, focussing on the movement's characteristics and strategic significance. Through answering the second research question specifically, the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix were then analysed separately, focussing on their inherent traits and possible applicability to the world of professional social networking. Finally, the general and specific considerations regarding the planning

and implementation of the marketing communications mix disciplines were discussed, highlighting the strategic relevance of the model. From this exploration, the following theoretical findings were made, providing an all-encompassing answer to the second research question:

An exploration of the origins of marketing theory firstly highlighted the rise and development of modern marketing practice. It was shown that modern marketing approaches are rooted in traditional marketing theories that were based on the central principle of exchange between two parties. From these humble but dependable roots, marketing theory evolved into more strategic movements that categorised marketing into distinguishable and manageable elements, such as the 4 P model of marketing. Sprouting from criticism of this model, a magnitude of new and exciting marketing ideologies surfaced that challenged the way organisations think about marketing. Relationship marketing, with a strong focus on the building of mutually beneficial relationships was one such model. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3A

Originating from the concept of exchange, traditional marketing theory paradigms included early observations from Kotler and the 4 P model of marketing that categorised marketing efforts into four discernible and manageable elements. From criticism of this model arose a wide range of new marketing approaches and theories that included prominent modern marketing movement such as relationship marketing and marketing communications.

The mutual traits observable between social networking and relationship marketing accentuated the connection between social networking and modern marketing philosophies. As made obvious during the exploration of social networking theory, these modern marketing platforms provide the ideal opportunity for the creation and nurturing of long-term relationships, a trait that directly complements the relationship-inclined approach central to relationship marketing. The link between social networking and relationship marketing is also accentuated by their mutual utilisation of technology for better results, as well as the reciprocal nature of both fields. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3B

Social networking has an inherent link with the modern marketing movement of relationship marketing as both fields are ideally suited for the creation and nurturing of long term relationships with the customers of an organisation; both fields utilise technology for enhanced effect and both fields focus on reciprocal communication. The relation between social networking and modern marketing theory supports the viewpoint that social networking should be analysed and contextualised within a modern marketing framework.

The modern movement of marketing communications builds on the progress of traditional marketing models such as the 4 P model, offering a strategic and specific approach to marketing challenges. Within the framework of marketing communications, it is believed that it is not sufficient to simply plan a marketing messaging strategy and implement it. Continuous alterations that are informed by listening to the attitudinal and behavioural responses of users is a crucial aspect of marketing communications. Another crucial aspect of marketing communications is that they accentuate the need for a strategically aligned approach to marketing. Each and every communication instance needs to be informed by an overarching strategy in order to ensure that messaging is consistent, ensuring a high impact in message delivery. Marketing communications can be an effective vehicle for marketing initiatives, but for this to be possible, their central premises must always be kept in mind and these must be reflected in the organisation's marketing initiatives. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3C

The modern marketing communications paradigm that concentrates on a strategic and specified approach to marketing challenges evolved from more traditional models of marketing, such as the 4 P's of marketing. If a marketing communications strategy of consistent, integrated, timely and highly targeted messaging is implemented, it will lead to a competitive advantage and an increase of sales for the organisation. Such a strategy must, however, be aligned with the overarching corporate strategy of an organisation.

Looking at each marketing communications mix discipline separately, the theory suggested that marketing movement consists of five disciplines, each containing discerning characteristics that encapsulate the marketing toolset available to marketing practitioners to be used to solve marketing challenges. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D1

The marketing communications mix can be divided into five exhaustive disciplines, namely advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations and direct marketing. Each of these disciplines has distinguishing characteristics which result in each having a unique set of weaknesses and strengths in a marketing context.

During the process of defining each discipline of the marketing communications mix, the researcher highlighted a superficial connection between social networking and marketing communications. Based on similarities observable in certain discernible traits, typical social networking functions can be superficially paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix. This act of pairing social networking actions with the disciplines of the marketing communications mix justified the use of marketing communications as a theoretical framework from which to analyse and assess professional social networking practice. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3E

Based on parallels in characteristics, typical social networking functions can be paired with each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix – this solidifies the case that the marketing communications mix is an ideal framework for analysing social networking actions in more detail.

Each marketing communications discipline was then introduced, along with an initial pairing with typical social networking actions.

The non-personal nature of advertising, as well as the fact that it is a paid medium are regarded as its distinguishing characteristics. It also increases the reach of messaging, which means it can be used effectively to create awareness for a product or service amongst a considerably large consumer group. There are a magnitude of advertising options and avenues available on social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D2

Advertising, the most visible of the marketing communications disciplines is a non-personal, paid form of communication with a high level of control that is especially adept at increasing brand awareness, brand equity and a level of competitive advantage for organisations. It can be used to promote an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor, but its capacity to persuade consumers is, however, suspect.

Whilst sales promotions can be an effective method of generating sales, they can have a detrimental effect on sales long term they diminish the perceived quality of products. An example of a value-adding sales promotion on Facebook is a fully-fledged competition or giveaway administered via a Facebook business page. These competitions are popular on social networking platforms and can be used to great effect to generate conversation on a Facebook business page. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D3:

As a highly controllable marketing communications discipline, sales promotion is the non-personal and tactical use of value-adding or value-increasing marketing techniques that provide the consumer with a sense of choice – monetary sales promotions can however have the negative effect of decreasing perceived product or service quality.

The face-to-face, personal quality of personal selling is the discipline's most discernible trait and because of it, this can be effective in changing the behavioural patterns of consumers. On social networking platforms, organisations can engage their customers in a direct manner by means of personal message threads. This provides the perfect opportunity for implementing the principles of personal selling as messaging can be highly intimate and personal. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D4:

Personal selling is a highly interpersonal, face-to-face marketing tool that has proven to be highly effective in supporting other marketing initiatives and increasing sales, due to the emotional connection that is created, effectively changing buying behaviour and perceptions – the costs of this method are, however, high, but it also benefits from the

Central to the concept of public relations is the aim of nurturing a sense of trust and goodwill between an organisation and its publics. Social networking platforms offer the ideal platform for building a sense of trust and goodwill, by allowing customers to connect to organisations on a human level. An example of this is when a company acknowledges its social networking community directly by thanking them for their inputs and interaction on a social networking page. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D5:

Public relations include communication activities that provide marketing leverage, heightened organisational and brand visibility and nurture a sense of goodwill. Public relations initiatives from an external source are perceived as brand endorsements and have a positive effect on brand sentiment, nurturing honest stakeholder interest – characterised by low costs, high levels of credibility, but a low level of message control.

Whilst similar to personal selling with regards to its intimate manner, direct marketing utilises technology to deliver highly targeted promotional messages centred around an organisation's product and service offerings. The personal nature of direct marketing is complementary to the relationship-inclined nature of social networking, allowing organisations to promote their products and services to their customers in a targeted and relevant manner. Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3D6:

Direct marketing actions are personalised, data-driven, interactive marketing communications activities that promote a specific offering by means of a strong call to action, supporting the nurturing of intimate consumer relationships. It is characterised by high costs per contact, but reduces costs regarding expenditure waste as messaging is highly targeted and relevant.

Finally, Chapter 3 explored the strategic considerations of marketing communications, where it was realised that numerous authors provide insights regarding the aspects that need to be considered when strategically implementing the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix. Of these, the most prominent and applicable to the study are:

- **The key characteristics of each tool**

The researcher noted that each discipline of the marketing communications mix is adept at performing specific marketing roles, according to the inherent characteristics of each tool. For example, to build a sense of goodwill an organisation should focus on public relations messaging, whilst sales promotion will be more effective when the need for increased sales arises.

- **Product complexity**

The complexity of a product can also dictate which discipline of the marketing communications mix is most suitable for promoting that specific product. For example, advertising is more suited for the promotion of consumer goods than it is for the promotion of industrial goods.

- **The influence of each tool on the decision process of consumers**

Referring back to the inherent characteristics of each discipline, it was noted that each discipline of the marketing communications mix has a unique influence on the decision process of consumers. Marketers need to define what the desired response from the consumer is and use this information to plan their use of the marketing communications mix disciplines. For example, when consumer awareness is desired, advertising is a suitable discipline and when sales are more crucial, the organisation should rather opt for a strategy that focusses on sales promotion.

- **The specific and general marketing objectives of the organisation and marketing campaign**

Echoing the strategic prerequisite of marketing communications, it was also noted that the combination and choice of marketing communications disciplines must also be aligned with both the specific as well as overall marketing objectives and strategy of the organisation. If an organisation has a general objective of, for example, nurturing a positive brand image, then it is vital that public relations messaging be included as an integral part of the marketing messaging strategy.

Based on this, the following guiding argument was derived:

Guiding argument 3F:

The choice, combination and level of intensity of each discipline in the marketing communications mix is dependent on a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration if marketing communications are to be implemented strategically to solve or manage a marketing challenge. The most prominent of these factors identified are the key characteristics of each tool; product complexity; the influence of each tool on the decision process for consumers and the objectives of marketing initiatives. Marketing communications disciplines must be used in synergy in a marketing campaign or task in order to achieve results that are strategically aligned with the overall corporate strategy of an organisation.

7.2.3 Typical social networking communication actions

With the research approach of the study described in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 noted the empirical processing of the study's sampling source. Firstly, the sampling source from Acer's social networking initiatives was presented and described in detail. By coding and analysing the messaging transmitted on an organisation's social networking platforms (between and within campaign time periods), a non-exhaustive list of typical social networking communications actions were identified and grouped into categories, based on similarities between messaging characteristics. This process addressed research question 3 of the study:

RQ3.What are the different communication activities typically used by marketing and communication practitioners to manage an organisation's social networking presence?

Each of the typical social networking communication activities defined via the process of answering this research question are now presented:

- Promotional campaign messaging is social networking messages that promote, administer, engage or refer to any campaign being run by the brand. These campaigns can either be hosted directly from the social networking platforms themselves or refer to a campaign on another marketing platform of the organisation. These messages are divided into the following sub-categories: promotion, administrative, pre and post, external, tie-in and indirect promotional campaign messaging.
- Product and service messaging is all social networking messages that refer to the deliverables of the organisation, excluding messaging related to any form of sales promotion. These messages intend to promote product and service offerings, but also aim to nurture long-term relationships between existing and new clients. These messages are divided into the following sub-categories: promotional, supportive, third party, tie-in and indirect product and service messaging.
- Brand messaging is all social networking messages that do not relate to any specific product or service offering of the organisation, but rather focuses on the brand, brand identity or the organisation itself. It aims to nurture honest brand interest and increases brand visibility. These messages are divided into the following sub-categories: brand identity, internal, partnership and sponsorship, cross platform, third-party, tie-in and indirect brand messaging.
- Unrelated messaging is social networking messaging that does not have any direct or indirect relevance to the brand or its deliverables. They are included in the social networking messaging plan of an organisation because of their inherent ability to nurture a sense of goodwill between the organisation and its customers, making them valuable additions to a social networking messaging strategy. This sense of goodwill is a result of these messages providing helpful

content (informative messaging); creating emotional responses from social networking subscribers (engaging messaging); transmitting content in a timely manner (timely messaging) and also because these messages focus specifically on the social networking audience (member-centric).

- Advertised messaging is any type of social networking messaging that is transmitted via a paid-for service on a social networking platform. By paying directly for the messaging distribution, it significantly increases the reach and spread of messaging amongst the users of the relevant social networking platforms, whether they are subscribers of the organisation's social networking accounts or not. These messages are divided into the following sub-categories: promotional campaign, product and service, brand or unrelated advertised messaging.
- Direct messaging are all one-to-one conversational message threads conducted between an organisational representative and a customer or potential customer on a social networking account of the organisation. The aim of these messages threads is to inform or persuade the customer with regards to a certain product or service offering or can also be utilised to strengthen other forms of social networking messaging, such as promotional campaign messaging.
- Hybrid messaging is any type of complex, layered social networking messaging that displays discernible traits of more than one of the social networking messaging categories of promotional campaign, product and service, direct, brand or unrelated. These messaging types allow social networking managers to communicate different marketing aspects within a single communication instance.

7.2.4 Pairing social networking actions with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix

After typical social networking actions were identified via the grounded theory process, these were paired with the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix, based on resemblances of characteristics and theoretical traits. In so doing, research question 4 of the study was addressed:

RQ4. How can social networking communication activities be paired with one or more of the five disciplines of Fill's (2006) marketing communications mix, based on their theoretical resemblances?

The following conclusions were drawn via the process of answering this research question:

By observing inherent similarities between the characteristics of typical social networking messaging categories identified and the characteristics of each of the disciplines of the marketing communications mix, social networking communication actions can be contextualised within a marketing communications mix framework. The paired categories identified are now presented:

- The sales promotions disciplines of the marketing communications mix (value-increasing and value-adding of nature) include the promotion of competitions and therefore resemble the social networking message category of promotional campaign messaging. Based on this mutual trait, it is concluded that the sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix is represented by the promotional campaign messaging category on social networking platforms.
- The direct marketing discipline of the marketing communications mix is paired with product and service messaging on social networking platforms based on the observation that both focus on the relaying of messaging regarding an organisation's deliverables. This pairing is additionally substantiated by noting the highly personalised nature of direct marketing initiatives that echoes with the intimate nature of social networking platforms.
- Seeing that social networking brand messaging does not aim to promote the deliverables of the organisation but rather promotes the brand identity itself, it is concluded that it be paired with the public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix which, in parallel to brand messaging, aims to achieve a heightened sense of brand and organisational visibility.
- The public relations discipline of the marketing communications mix is additionally paired with unrelated social networking messaging, on the basis that both aim to create and nurture a sense of goodwill between the organisation and its customers. A crucial distinction between unrelated messaging and the public relations discipline is however made, namely that unrelated messaging nurtures goodwill for the brand in an indirect manner, whereas public relations functions are typically directly focussed on the brand.
- A distinct similarity exists between the social networking category of advertised messaging and the advertising discipline of the marketing communications mix, namely that both communication mediums utilise a form of paid messaging channel that dramatically increases the awareness and reach levels of messaging – On this basis, the two marketing mediums are paired with one another.
- The highly personal nature of the personal selling discipline of the marketing communications mix resonates with the intimate nature of social networking in general, but is better represented by the direct messaging category of social networking messaging as both engage the customer in a one-on-one conversational degree regarding the deliverables of the organisation or as a support mechanism for other marketing initiatives.

- The pairing of Hybrid messaging on social networking platforms is a dynamic process that will depend on the specific combination of social networking messaging types observable in the social networking message being analysed. For example, a social networking message that is a hybrid of brand and promotional campaign messaging can be paired with both the public relations and sales promotion discipline of the marketing communications mix.

7.2.5 A theoretical framework for implementing a social networking messaging strategy

With these pairings in mind, a process of action research was conducted: The main sampling source was evaluated with regards to the main strategic considerations of the marketing communications mix in order to compile a series of strategic suggestions to improve the representation of marketing communications disciplines. These considerations were then transferred to an upcoming social networking campaign of Acer where after their outcomes were evaluated and key learnings noted. In so doing, research question 5 was answered:

RQ5. What will a guideline by which professional social networking actions can be strategically planned and implemented entail?

As an answer to this research question, the following approach, derived from the completion of the action research process is suggested in order to apply the principles of marketing communications strategically within a marketing communications context:

The current representation level of each social networking messaging category within an organisation's social networking messaging plan and strategy must firstly be assessed before insightful recommendations can be made. As each social networking messaging category has been shown to resemble a specific discipline of the marketing communications mix, this process will simultaneously also assess the current representation level of each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix. Thereafter, the theoretical considerations regarding the strategic application of marketing communications mix disciplines can be referenced in order to suggest a series of changes that will improve the level to which the organisation's social networking messaging is strategically aligned with specific marketing objectives as well as the overall objectives of the organisation.

In answering this research question, the study's main research question was also conclusively answered:

How can the principles of marketing communications be strategically implemented within a social networking communication context?

By following a process of action research, the researcher demonstrated how the proposed model that involves the pairing between typical social networking messaging types and the five disciplines of the

marketing communications mix can be used as a flexible framework for the strategically aligned implementation of professional social networking communication actions. The researcher found that due to the model's roots in a dependable and trusted marketing framework, it was particularly useful in providing structure and business meaning to the social networking messaging strategy of an organisation. As it was contextualised within a familiar marketing setting, the model was well received by the client and helped to justify the social networking manager's messaging choices. It is also noted that the researcher could use the model effectively to clearly identify messaging imbalances caused by unplanned deviations from the messaging strategy. With imbalances noted, the researcher was able to rebalance the messaging inventory in order to reinstate the strategic value of the messaging plan. All of this accentuated the versatility and adaptability of the model, promoting the researcher's viewpoint that it should be considered as a useful guideline for the strategic implementation of marketing communications within social networking communications context.

Whilst this suggested model does have certain limitations regarding the incorporation of each discipline of the marketing communications mix, it does reference all disciplines as important strategic considerations when planning a social networking messaging strategy. The model should, however, not be applied to such an aggressive and rigid degree that it hampers the inherent creative marketing possibilities that social networking platforms provide to organisations or that it leads to an unfavourable effect for the social networking manager. Furthermore, the pairing of marketing communications mix disciplines with typical social networking messaging types do not necessarily mean that all traits are directly transferrable between the two fields. It is simply proposed as an adaptable guideline that helps to steer social networking initiatives along a strategically aligned path. The unique circumstances of the social networking platform, its audience should always be considered before implementing suggestions based on this model in order to ensure that the model's application does not lead to unfavourable brand perceptions.

7.3 Recommendations

The following section of the study will propose a series of recommendations sprouting from the answering of the research questions as well as the general findings as listed in the previous section.

7.3.1 Recommendation 1: Committed and informed social networking participation

The literary analysis of professional social networking indicated it to be a marketing channel with a magnitude of organisational benefits. With this taken into consideration, it is recommended that an organisation utilise these benefits by actively taking part in social networking platforms and nurturing a strong social networking presence.

Modern consumers view social networking platforms as the ideal channels for engaging with organisations in an intimate and conversational regard. Organisations that do not set aside resources in order to grow and nurture a visible social networking platforms will therefore fail to meet the expectations of the modern consumer, ultimately leading to a deprecation in brand perception and missed opportunities for engaging existing as well as new customers.

However, it has also been shown that social networking initiatives do have certain pitfalls, which could lead to negative results for the organisation if not considered and taken into account. One of the most crucial of these pitfalls is the need for a total commitment to social networking initiatives and the organisation's social networking platforms. Once a social networking identity is created for an organisation, consumers will form the expectation that the organisation engage them with quality content and to a diligent and on-going degree. Failing to do so will result in unsatisfied social networking account subscribers forming a tarnished brand image of the organisation and ultimately, a loss in sales. Commitment is therefore a vital ingredient of any social networking strategy and should be considered an integral ingredient of any organisation's social networking strategy.

The ever-changing and developing nature of the social networking industry also accentuates the need for continuous research. In light of this, it is recommended that organisations also stay informed with regards to new trends and changes within the social networking and overarching digital industry. These changes need to inform future social networking strategies and will ensure organisations maintain a differential competitive advantage and meet the dynamic needs of their digitally savvy customers.

7.3.2 Recommendation 2: A strategic approach to professional social networking

Taking into the consideration that the study's suggested pairing of marketing communications mix disciplines and typical social networking communication actions was recognised to be a useful model for strategic evaluation, planning and implementation of professional social networking, it is recommended that the model be used as a strategic guideline for professional social networking.

The model is furthermore endorsed by the observation that it contextualises the new and developing field of professional social networking within the framework of a static and trusted marketing practice theory, namely marketing communications – This gives social networking actions a sense of credibility comparable to that of traditional marketing practices. Also, the process of partitioning typical social networking actions into describable categories and sub-categories makes social networking managers aware of the social networking inventory available to them, which in turn means that they can make more insightful decisions when planning social networking content and initiatives.

It is recommended that social networking managers follow a similar process to the action research process utilised in this study in order to implement the model, utilising its strategic value: Firstly, social networking managers must analyse their current social networking content plan according to the representation level of each social networking messaging type as well as each discipline of the marketing communications mix. Secondly, with the representation levels now determined, social networking managers must assess the degree to which this representation is strategically aligned, according to the main theoretical considerations for the implementation of marketing communications mix disciplines. Thirdly, social networking managers can then use this assessment as a reference for the implementation of a series of planned changes to the social networking messaging strategy of the organisation. Finally, the changes must be monitored and then possibly adapted according to the responses of social networking account members as well as additional social networking effectiveness metrics regarded as important by the organisation in order to ensure it is having the desired positive effect.

It is once again stressed that the study's model should only be used as an adaptable guideline by which to strategically align an organisation's social networking initiatives. The model should not be applied so rigidly that it limits the creative possibilities of social networking marketing or hampers the duties of the social networking manager.

7.3.3 Recommendation 3: Utilising social networking initiatives to their full potential

The model also demonstrated that social networking initiatives can be utilised in a highly practical degree by accentuating their functional properties regarding the categorisation of social networking messaging types. It is therefore recommended that social networking managers take into consideration the functional aspects of social networking messaging when they plan the structure of an overall social networking plan as well as individual messaging instances.

By doing so, social networking managers can utilise the full potential of their messaging transmissions on social networking platforms and prevent the transmitting of messages that do not serve a functional purpose, thus preventing the unnecessary waste of valuable messaging instances on social networking platforms.

This recommendation is regarded as a stand-alone suggestion from recommendation 1. Social networking managers can apply the proposed model in this study or use their own methods and procedures in order to assess the functional value of their social networking messaging.

7.3.4 Recommendation 4: An integrated approach to professional social networking

The pairing of social networking actions and the disciplines of the marketing communications mix has also established the presence of discernible links and similarities between professional social networking and modern marketing theory. With this in mind, it is suggested that social networking be fully integrated into an organisation's marketing inventory.

The pairing process has proven that social networking initiatives need not be regarded as an isolated marketing medium that cannot be measured and applied according to a trusted and dependable marketing framework. Utilising social networking processes and social networking platforms as a multi-faceted marketing medium that incorporates all forms of modern marketing disciplines ensures that its overall marketing relevance is solid.

This integrated approach furthermore accentuates the ways in which social networking can complement, support and strengthen other marketing channels and initiatives, as well as how these other initiatives can in turn support social networking initiatives.

It is, however, the responsibility of the social networking manager or marketing manager of the organisation to ensure that social networking's importance within the greater marketing mix be defended and promoted during marketing meetings. Opportunities to liaise and support other marketing initiatives must be capitalised upon in order to provide additional proof of social networking's worth as a marketing tool.

Applying relevant traditional marketing success metrics will furthermore help to contextualise the social networking initiatives of an organisation with regards to concepts and context familiar to the marketing department and overarching management of the organisation.

7.4 Shortcomings and suggestions for future research

7.4.1 Shortcomings of the study

The social networking data that was analysed during the study was interpreted according to the presuppositions of a single social networking manager. Although the researcher himself has experience within the field of social networking, it is plausible that another social networking manager might have interpreted the data differently. As the data analysis was however partially based on a dependable and trusted theoretical marketing model, the danger of this shortcoming is minimised.

The study only analysed two of the world's most prominent social networking platforms, excluding other major social networking platforms such as YouTube, Google Plus, LinkedIn and Pinterest. The

possibility therefore exists that additional social networking messaging types could have been observed if data from other social networking platforms were also analysed.

The study furthermore analysed the social networking data of a single organisation. Different approaches in marketing could mean that data from other organisation's social networking accounts could deliver different social networking messaging categories.

The proposed model does not fully incorporate each of the five disciplines of the marketing communications mix into the social networking content plan of an organisation. However, the model does indirectly accommodate all of the marketing communications mix disciplines and make suggestions with regards to the strategic implementation of each.

7.4.2 Suggestions for future research

Taking into the consideration the data sampling limitations of the study, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted on an entirely different organisation's social networking content strategy in order to assess the transferred applicability of the study's model. It is furthermore recommended that the study be applied to other social networking platforms in order to ascertain a more universal and complete list of typical social networking communication actions.

A study that explores the specific ways in which social networking actions can complement, support and strengthen other marketing channels, mediums and initiatives could be valuable as an additional affirmation of the marketing prominence and worth of professional social networking. Such a study can also suggest a framework for integrating social networking initiatives with traditional marketing initiatives.

A study that aims to directly compare traditional marketing effectiveness metrics with those of effectiveness metrics unique to social networking platforms could reveal valuable insights regarding how social networking results can be interpreted via trusted traditional marketing effectiveness metrics.

7.5 General conclusion

The study provided an exploration of the strategic implementation of marketing communications within a social networking communications context. During this exploration it has been shown that the developing field of professional social networking has the capacity to be interpreted within the context of modern marketing practice.

Interpreting social networking initiatives within the context of a modern marketing communications framework makes it possible to devise an adaptable guideline for the strategic implementation of

professional social networking initiatives. This model (or any other) should, however, not be applied unreasonably rigidly to the extent that it hampers the creative possibilities of social networking platforms.

An integrated, functional, strategically aligned, committed and informed approach to social networking initiatives enables an organisation to exploit a diverse range of benefits that can to be gained from utilising social networking platforms as marketing tools.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaker, D.A. 1991. *Managing Brand Equity*. New York: The Free Press.

Abrahams, R. 2009. *Social media as a means of communication with external stakeholders*. Wellington: Cape Peninsula University of Technology. (Dissertation – MTech).

Acer. 2012. Acer 'About us'. <http://www.acer.co.za/ac/en/ZA/content/company> Date of access: 14 Aug. 2012.

Acer. 2012. Press release: Acer Notebooks Rank No. 1 in Q212 Shipments Worldwide. <http://www.acer-group.com/public/News/2012/20120814.htm> Date of access: 14 Aug. 2012.

Acquisti, A. & Gross, R. 2006. Imagined communities: awareness, information sharing and privacy on the Facebook. (*In PET 2006, LNCS 4285 ed*, Berlin).

Agarwal, S. & Teas, R.K. 2002. Cross-national applicability of a perceived quality model. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 11(4/5):213.

Agresta, S. & Bough, B.B. 2011. *Perspectives on social media marketing*. Boston: Cengage learning.

Angen, M. J. 2000. Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(3):386.

Annells, M. 1996 Hermeneutic phenomenology: philosophical perspectives and current use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 23(4):705.

Avery, S. 1997. Online tool removes costs from process. *Purchasing*, 123 (6):79.

Babin, B.J., James, S.B. & William, R.D. 1995. Salesperson Stereotypes, Consumer Emotions, and their Impact on Information Processing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23:94.

Barnard, M.H. 2010. *An investigation of the use of social media news releases to create dialogue around brands*. George: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. (Dissertation – MA).

- Barnett-Page, E. & Thomas, J. 2009. Methods for the synthesis of qualitative research: A critical review. *BMC Med Res Methodol*, 9:65.
- Baskerville, R.L. 1999. Investigating information systems with action research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: 17.
- Belch, G.E. & Belch, M.A. 2001. Advertising and Promotion: An integrated marketing communications perspective. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Bennett, A.R. 1997. The five V's - a buyer's perspective of the marketing: The Marketing Mix Revisited 433 mix. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 15(3):151-155.
- Beth, H. 2010. Social Media as the Perfect B2B Public Relations Tool. <http://socialmediab2b.com/2010/05/b2b-social-media-public-relations>. Date of access: 13 Oct. 2012.
- Berthon, P.R., Pitt, L.F., Plangger, K. & Shapiro, D. 2012. Marketing meets Web 2.0, social media and creative consumers: Implications for international marketing strategy.
- Bettison, T. 2009. Social networking for rookies: from rookie to professional in a week. London: Marshall Cavendish.
- Bhanot, S. 2012. Use of social media by companies to reach their customers. *SIES Journal of Management*, 8(1):47-49.
- BizCommunity. 2012. Press release: New partner program from Acer. <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/458/74734.html> Date of access: 14 Aug. 2012.
- Blaikie, N. 1993. Approaches to social enquiry. Cambridge: Polity.
- Boone, L.E., & Kurtz, D.L. 2007. Contemporary marketing. 13th ed. Mason, OH: Thomson/South-Western.
- Borden, N.H. 1964. The concept of the Marketing Mix. *Journal of Advertising Research*: 2-7.
- Brassington, F. & Pettitt, S. 2003. Principles of Marketing. 3rd ed. Prentice Hall / Financial Times.

- Bravo, R., Fraj, E. & Martínez, E. 2007. Family as a source of consumer-based brand equity. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 16(3):188.
- Britten, N. 2011. Qualitative research on health communication: What can it contribute?. *Patient Education and counselling*, 82(2011):384-387.
- Brogan, C. 2010. Social media 101: Tactics and tips to develop your business online. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Brown, L.D. & Tandon, R. 1983. Ideology and political economy in inquiry: action research and participatory research. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 19(3):277-294.
- Bryman, A. 2008. Social research methods. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bucklin, R. & Sismeiro, C. 2009. Click Here for Internet Insight: Advances in Clickstream Data Analysis in Marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(1):38.
- Buil, I., de Chernatony, L. & Martínez, E. 2010. The effect of advertising and sales promotions on brand equity. Paper presented at the 6th Thought Leaders in Brand Management International Conference.
- Buil, I., de Chernatony, L. & Martínez, E. 2011. Examining the role of advertising and sales promotions in brand equity creation, *Journal of Business Research* (2011), 3.
- Burns, A.C. & Bush, R.F. 2005. Marketing research: Online research applications. Upper Saddle river, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Buss, A. & Strauss, N. 2009. Online Communities handbook. California: New Riders.
- Caemmerer, B. 2009. The planning and implementation of integrated marketing communications. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 27(4):536.
- Cambria, E., Grassi, M., Hussain, A. & Havasi, C. 2012. Sentic computing for social media marketing. *Multimed tools Appl*, 59:557.

Campbell, L. & Diamond, W. 1990. Framing and sales promotions: the characteristics of a “good deal”. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 7(4):25.

Carmines, E.G. & Zeller, R.A. 1979. Reliability and Validity Assessment. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Chaffey, D., Mayer, R., Johnston, K. & Ellis-Chadwick, F. 2003. Internet Marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Chandon, P., Wansink, B. & Laurent, G. 2000. A benefit congruency framework of sales promotion effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing*, 64:65.

Chatterbox Digital. 2012. Chatterbox Digital Social Media Statistics - South Africa 2012.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixgE8Ay99eE>. Date of access: 27 Aug. 2012.

Clapperton, G. 2010. This is social media: Tweet, blog, link and post your way to business success. West Sussex: Capstone Publishing.

Clissett, P. 2008. Evaluating qualitative research. *Journal of Orthopaedic*, 12:103-104.

Coleman, G. & O'Connor, R. 2007. Using grounded theory to understand software process improvement: A study of Irish software product companies. *Information and Software Technology*, 49:655-656.

Constantinides, E. 2002. The 4S Web-Marketing Mix model. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 1(2002):57-76.

Constantinides, E. 2006. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 22(3/4):408-412.

Corey, S. 1953. Action research to improve school practice. New York: Columbia University.

Coviello, N.E., Brodie, R.J. & Munro, H.J. 2000. An investigation of marketing practice by firm size. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 15:523-545.

Cowell, D.W. 1984. The Marketing of Services. Institute of Marketing and the CAM Foundation: Heineman Professional Publishing.

Creswell, J.W. 1998. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cronholm, S. & Goldkuhl, G. 2004. Conceptualising participatory action research: Three different practices. *Electronic journal of business research methods*, 2(2):2.

Culliton, J.W. 1964. *The Management of Marketing Costs*. Boston, MA: Harvard University.

Dahlen, M., Lange, F. & Smith, T. 2010 *Marketing Communications: A Brand Narrative Approach*. New Jersey: John Wiley.

Dalkir, K. 2010. Measuring the impact of social media: Connection, communication and collaboration. (In Girard, J.P. & Girard, J.L. ed, *Social knowledge: Using social media to know what you know*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global).

Dekimpe, M.G. & Hanssens D.M. 1995. The Persistence of Marketing Effects on Sales. *Marketing Science*, 14(1):1-21.

DelVecchio, D., Henard, D.H. & Freling, T.H. 2006. The effect of sales promotion on post-promotion brand preference: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Retailing*, 82(3):203.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2000. *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. 1989. *Interpretive interactionism*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Dick, B. 2000. *A beginner's guide to action research*.

<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/guide.html> Date of access: 28 Oct. 2012.

Dixon, D.F. & Blois, K.J. 1983. Some Limitations of the 4 F's as a Paradigm for Marketing. *Proceedings of the Marketing Education Group*. Cranfield School of Management.

Doyle, P. & Stern, P. 2006. *Marketing management and strategy*. London: Pearson Education.

Doyle, P. 1994. *Marketing Management and Strategy*. Prentice Hall.

Du Plessis, F., Van Heerden, N. & Cook, G. 2010. Integrated marketing communication. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Du Plessis, P.J., Jooste, C.J. & Strydom, J.W. 2001. Applied Strategic Marketing. Sandown: Heinemann.

Du Plessis, T.C. 2010. Theoretical guidelines for social media marketing communication, *Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa*, 29(1).

Duncan, K. 2002. IMC: Using advertising and promotion to build brands. Burr Ridge: McGraw-Hill.

Duncan, T. & Moriarty, S. 1997. Driving Brand Value: Using Integrated Marketing to Manage Profitable Stakeholder Relationships. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Duncan, T.R. & Everett, S.E. 1993. Client perceptions of integrated marketing communication. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 33(3):30.

Duncan, T.R. 2002. IMC: Using Advertising and Promotion to Build Brands. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Dwyer, F.R., Schurr, P.H. & Oh, S. 1987. Developing Buyer-Seller Relationship. *Journal of Marketing*, 51(2):12.

Dye, R. 2000. The buzz on buzz. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(6):139.

Dyson S., Brown B. 2006. Social theory and applied health research. Maidenhead: Open University.

Earle, V. 2010. Phenomenology as research method or substantive metaphysics? An overview of phenomenology's uses in nursing. *Nursing Philosophy*, 11:286.

E-Consultancy. 2009. Social media trends briefing February 2009. <http://econsultancy.com/za/reports>. Date of access: 14 Oct. 2012.

Edell, J.A. 1993. Advertising Interactions: A Route to Understanding Brand Equity. (In *Advertising Exposure, Memory, and Choice*, ed. Mitchell, A. A. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum).

Egan, J. 2011. Relationship marketing: Exploring relational strategies in marketing. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Epstein, K. 2005. Philanthropy, Inc. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: 26.

Fang, F. 2010. Social Networking and Its Business Values. California: California State University San Marcos.

Fill, C. 2002. Marketing Communications: Contexts, Strategies and Applications. 3rd ed. London: Prentice-Hall.

Fill, C. 2006. Marketing Communications: Engagement, strategies and practice. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Fill, C. 2009. Marketing Communications: Interactivity, Communities and Content. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Fill, C. 2011. Essentials of marketing communications. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Flood, A. 2010. Understanding phenomenology. *Nurse researcher*, (17):10.

Fowler, G. A. 2003. Junk Mailers Discover Asia is Close to Heaven. The Wall Street Journal, March 15.

Francis, D. 1991. Moving from non-interventionist research to participatory action. (In Collins, C.P., ed. Proceedings of The First World Congress on Action Research. Sunnybank Hills, Queensland: Acorn).

Frey, A.W. 1961. Advertising, 3rd ed. New York: The Ronald Press.

Gabrielli, V. & Balboni B. 2010. SME practice towards integrated marketing communications. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 28(3):275.

Gallagher, S. & Sorensen, J.B. 2006. Experimenting with phenomenology. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 15:120-122.

Galliers, R.D. 1992. Choosing information systems research approaches. (In Galliers, R. ed. Information Systems Research: Issues, Methods and Practical Guidelines. Boston, MA: Blackwell).

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. 1967. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.

Glaser, B.G. 1992. Emergency Versus Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis, *Sociology Press*, Mill Valley, CA.

Goff, B.G., Boles, J.S., Bellenger, D.N. & Stojack, C. 1997. The Influence of Salesperson Selling Behaviors on Customer Satisfaction with Products. *Journal of Retailing*, 73(2):171.

Goldman, J. 1984. Public Relations in the Marketing mix. Henley-on-Thames: NTC Business Books.

Goulding, C. 2002. Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European Journal of Marketing*, 393(3/4):299.

Graham, P. 2005. Web 2.0. <http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html> Date of Access: 13 Oct. 2012.

Green, J. & Thorgood, N. 2004. Qualitative methods for health research (introducing qualitative methods series). London: Sage Publications.

Greenhalgh, T. & Taylor, R. 1997. Papers that go beyond numbers (qualitative research). *BMJ*, 315:741-743.

Grönroos, C. 1994. From Marketing Mix to Relationship Marketing - Towards a Paradigm Shift in Marketing. *Management Decision*, 32(2):324-327.

Grosskopf, F.S. & Tremblay, S.V. 2003. Advertising efficiency and the choice of media mix: a case of beer. *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 22:505.

Guba, E. & Lincoln, Y. 1989. Fourth Generation Evaluation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, S. & Rosenberg, C. 2009. Get Connected: The Social Networking Toolkit for Business. Entrepreneur Press.

Hammersley, M. 1989. The Dilemma of Qualitative Method: Herbert Blumer and the Chicago Tradition. New York: Routledge.

Hanna, R., Rohm, A. & Crittenden, V.L.2011. We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem. *Business Horizons*, 54:265.

Hanson, J.L., Balmer, D.F. & Giardino, A.P. 2011.Qualitative research methods for medical educators.*Academic paediatrics*, 11(5):375.

Heath, H.& Cowley, S.2004. Developing a grounded theoryapproach: a comparison ofGlaser and Strauss. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 4:142.

Hoey, C. 1998. Maximising the effectiveness of Web-based marketing communications, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 16(1):31.

Hoffman, D.L. & Fodor, M. 2010. Can you measure the ROI of your social media marketing?. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 41:42.

Hoffman, D.L. & Novak, T.P. 2010. 'Social media strategy' (*In Handbook on Marketing Strategyed*, Northhampton: Edward Elgar Publishing).

Holloway, I.1997. Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research. Oxford: Blackwell Science.

Huberman, B.A., Romero, D.M., & Wu, F. 2009. Social networks that matter: Twitter under the microscope. *First Monday*, 14(1).

Hughes, D.J., Rowe, M., Batey, M. & Lee, A. 2012.A tale of two sites: Twitter vs. Facebook and the personality predictors of social media usage. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28:561.

Hughes, G. & Fill, C.2007.Redefining the nature and format of the marketing communications mix. *The Marketing Review*, 7(1):45.

Hunt, K.G.2010.Social media in recruitment. *Journal of Property Management*, 75(6):36.

Husserl, E.1970.The crisis of the European sciences and transcendental phenomenology.Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Jobber, D. 2001. Principles and Practice of Marketing. 3rd ed. McGrawHill.

Jue, A., Marr, J.K. &Kassotakis, M.E.2011. Social media at work: How networking disciplines propel organizational performance. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kaplan, A.M. &Haenlin, M. 2010.Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media.*Business Horizons*,53:61.

Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57:1-22.

Keller, K.L.1996. Brand Equity and Integrated Communication. Integrated Marketing Communications,Moore Jeri and Thorson Ester Eds. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Keller, K.L.2001.Mastering the Marketing Communications Mix: Micro and Macro Perspectives on Integrated Marketing Communication Programs. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17:819-847.

Kemmis, S. 1998. Action research. (*In* Keeves, J., ed. Educational research, methodology and measurement: An international handbook. New York: Pergamon).

Kemmis, S.&McTaggard, R.2000. Participatory Action research.(*In* Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., ed. Handbook of qualitative research. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

Khang, H., Ki, E. &Ye, L. 2012. Social media research in advertising, communication, marketing and Public Relations, 1997 - 2010.*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterley*, 89(2):280-281.

Khanlou, N. & Peter, E. 2005. Participatory action research: considerations for ethical review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 60:2334.

Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P. & Silvestre, B.S.2011. Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media.*Business Horizons*, 54:241-243.

Kim, J. & Hyun, Y.2011. A model to investigate the influence of marketing-mix efforts and corporate image on brand equity in the IT software sector. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40:423-428.

Kim, Y.A., Song, H.S. & Kim, S.H.2009.A new marketing strategy map for direct marketing. *Knowledge-Based Systems*, 22:327.

Kinard, B.R. & Capella, M.L.2006.Relationship marketing: the influence of consumer involvement on perceived service benefits.*Journal of services Marketing*, 12(4):365.

Kitchen, P.J.1996.Public relations in the promotional mix: a three-phase analysis.*Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 12(2):19-25.

Kitchen, P.J., Brignell, J., Li, T., Kim, I. & Jones, G.S. 2004.The emergence of IMC: a theoretical perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research*,44(1),19-30.

Koch, T.1995. Interpretive approaches in nursing research: the influence of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*,21(5):828.

Kock, N.2004.The three threats of action research: a discussion of methodological antidotes in the context of an information systems study. *Decision Support Systems*, 37:265-281.

Kotler, P. 1972. A generic concept of marketing.*Journal of Marketing*, 36(2):46.

Kotler, P. 1988. *Marketing management: Analysis, planning, implementation and control*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Kotler, P. 1997.*Marketing Management: analysis. Planning and implementation, 21 and Control*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Kotler, P. 2003. *Marketing Management*. 11th Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kumar, N., Scheer, L. &Kotler, P. 2000. From Market Driven to Market Driving.*European Management Journal*, 18(2):132.

Kumar, V. & Sundaram, B. 2012. An evolutionary road map to winning with social media marketing. *Marketing Research*: 4.

Lancaster, G. & Massingham, L. 1993. *Essentials of marketing: Text and cases*. London: McGraw-Hill.

Lane, W.R. & Russell, T. 2001. *Advertising: A framework*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Lauterborn, B. 1990. New marketing litany: four Ps passes: C-words take over. *Advertising Age*, 61 (41):26.

Ledford, G.E. & Mohrman, S.A. 1993. Self-design for high involvement: a large-scale organizational change. *Human Relations*, 46(2):169.

Lee, D.H., & Park, C.W. 2007. Conceptualization and measurement of multidimensionality of integrated marketing communications. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(1):228.

Levy, J. 2010. *Facebook marketing: Designing your next marketing campaign*. Indiana: Pearson Education limited.

Lewin, K. 1946. Action research and minority problems. *J Soc*, 2(4):34.

Li, C. & Bernoff, J. 2008. Harnessing the Power of the Oh-So-Social Web. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 49(3):39.

Libert, B. 2010. *Social Nation*. New Jersey: Wiley.

Lincoln, S.R. 2009. *Mastering Web 2.0: Transform your business using key website and social media disciplines*. London: Kogan Page.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.

Lipsman, A., Mudd, G., Rich, M. & Bruich, S. 2012. The power of "like". How brands reach (and influence) fans through social-media marketing. *Journal of advertising research*, March 2012.

Little, E. & Marandi, E. 2003. *Relationship Marketing Management*. Thompson Learning: London.

Lloyd, C. & Newell, H. 2001. Capture and transfer: improving the performance of the pharmaceutical sales rep. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(3):464-483.

Luck, D.J. 1969. Broadening the concept of marketing - too far. *Journal of Marketing*, 33:53-55.

Malthouse, E.C., Calder, B.J. & Tamhane, A. 2007. The effects of media context experiences on advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 36(3):11.

Mangold, W.G. & Faulds, D.J. 2009. Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52:359.

American Marketing Association. 1985. AMA board approves new marketing definition. *Marketing News*, 5:1.

Martínez, E., Montaner, T. & Pina, J.M. Brand extension feedback: the role of advertising. *Journal of Business Research*, 62:308.

Mathur, P., Black, J.E., Cao, J., Berger, P.D. & Weinberg, B.D. 2012. The impact of social media usage on consumer buying behaviour. *Advances in Management*, 5(1):14.

McCarthy, E.J. 1964. Basic Marketing, a Managerial Approach. Homewood: Richard D. Irwin.

McConnell-Henry, T., Chapman, Y. & Francis, K. 2009. Unpacking Heideggerian phenomenology. *Southern Online Journal of Nursing Research*, 9(1):6.

Mcluhan, M. 1964. Understanding Media: The Extensions of man. New York: McGraw-Hill.

McNamara, M.S. 2005. Knowing and doing phenomenology: The implications of the critique of 'nursing phenomenology' for a phenomenological inquiry: A discussion paper. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 42:696-697.

McTaggart, R. 1991. Principles for participatory action research. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3):169.

Mead, G.H. 1934. Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Men, L.R. & Tsai, W.S. 2011. How companies cultivate relationships with publics on social network sites: Evidence from China and the United States. *Public Relations review*, 11.

Mitchell, S. 2003. The New Age of Direct Marketing. *Journal of Database Marketing*, 10(3):219-229.

Mitchell, S.N., Reily, R.C. & Logue, M.E. 2009. Benefits of collaborative action research for the beginning teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25:345

Mohanty, J.N. 2008. *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl. A Historical Development*. London: Yale University Press.

Moore, J. & Thorson, E. 1996. *Integrated Marketing Communications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Moorman, M., Neijens, P.C. & Smit, E.G. 2005. The effects of program responses on the processing of commercials placed at various positions in the program and the block. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(1):55.

Moran, D. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.

Moran, D. 2002. Editor's introduction. (In Moran, D., Mooney, T. ed. *The Phenomenology Reader*. London: Routledge).

Morris, T. 2009. *All a Twitter: A Personal and Professional Guide to Social Networking with Twitter*. Indianapolis, IN: Que.

Moustakas, C. 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. California: Sage.

Mulero, S.O. 2010. *Use of social networks for marketing in the small, medium enterprise sector*. Wellington: Cape Peninsula University of Technology. (Dissertation – MTech).

Mulhern, F. 2009. Integrated marketing communications: From media channels to digital connectivity. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15(2-3):2-10.

Mumford, E. 2001. Advice for an action researcher. *Information Technology and People*, 14(1):12-27.

Murphey, C. 2011. In depth: Twitter terrorism. <http://www.themarketer.co.uk/articles/features/twitter-terrorism/> Date of access: 14 Oct. 2012.

Mweb. 2010. Social networking goes mainstream in South Africa. <http://www.mweb.co.za/aboutus/PressOffice/2010/SocialnetworkinggoesmainstreaminSouthAfrica.as> Date of access: 27 Aug. 2012.

Naik, P.A.& Raman, K. 2003. Understanding the impact of synergy on multimedia communications. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 40(4):375.

Napoli, P. 2003. Audience economics: Media institutions and the audience marketplace. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nastasi, B.K. & Schensul, S.L. 2005. Contributions of qualitative research to the validity of intervention research. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43:177.

Nations, D.2011.The Web 2.0 Glossary.<http://webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/social-media.htm>. Date of access: 23 Oct. 2011.

Network Intellect. 2011. The Key Differences Between Facebook And Twitter. <http://www.networkintellect.com/blog/key-differences-facebook-twitter/> Date of access: 6 Aug. 2012.

Nelson-Field, K.& Klose, G. 2012. The Social Media Leap: Integrating Social Media into Marketing Strategy. <http://www.slideshare.net/fusionshare/the-social-media-leap-esomar-berlin-2010-5917061> Date of access: 12 Oct. 2012.

Newson, A., Houghton, D.& Patten, J.2009. Blogging and Other Social Media. Hampshire: Gower.

Ohmae, K. 1982. The mind of the Strategist: The Art of Japanese Business. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Palazón-Vidal, M. & Delgado-Ballester, E. 2005. Sales promotions effects on consumer-based brand equity. *International Journal of Market Research*, 47(2):179-204.

Papasolomou, I. & Melanthiou, Y. 2012. Social Media: Marketing Public Relations' New best friend. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 18(3):320-326.

Percy, L.1997.Strategies for Implementing Integrated Marketing Communications.Chicago, IL: NTC Business Books.

Petty, N.J., Thomson, O.P. & Stew, G.2012. Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 1:Introducing the philosophy of qualitative research. *Manual therapy*, 17:270-271.

Phillips, D.2009.Online public relations: a practical guide to developing an online strategy in the world of social media. London: Kogan Page.

Pickton, D. & Broderick, A. 2005.Integrated Marketing Communications. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Plummer, J. S.,Rappaport, T.H. & Barocci, R. 2007. The online advertising playbook: Proven strategies and tested tactic. New York: Wiley.

Poter, G., Blaufuss, K. & Acheampong, F.O. 2012. Gendered patterns of IMT adoption and use: Learning from action research. *Research in Transportation Economics*, 34:11-12.

Prasad, A. & Sethi, S.P.2009.Integrated marketing communications in markets with uncertainty and competition. *Automatica*, 45:601-610.

Rafiq, M. & Ahmed, P.K. 1992. The Marketing Mix Reconsidered. The Marketing Mix Revisited 437 Proceedings of the Marketing Education Group Conference. Salford.

Raju, J.S.1995.Theoretical models of sales promotions: Contributions, limitations, and a future research agenda. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 85:2.

Rappoport, F. & Wainwright, P. 2006. Phenomenology as a paradigm of movement.*Nursing Inquiry*, 13(3):229.

Reed, J. 2011.Get Up to Speed with Online Marketing: How to Use Websites, Blogs, Social Networking and Much More. London: Prentice Hall.

- Rizzo, T. 2011. How to achieve high direct marketing response rates. *ABA Bank Marketing*, 43(5):30-32.
- Robins, F. 1991. Four Ps or Four Cs or Four Ps and Four Cs. MEG Conference.
- Robinson, D. 2006. Public relations comes of age. *Business Horizons*, 49:247-248.
- Rolfe, G. 2006. Validity, trustworthiness and rigour: quality and the idea of qualitative research. *J AdvNurs*, 53:307-311.
- Romano, C. & Ratnatunga, J. 1996. The Role of Marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 29(7):9-30.
- Sandelowski, M. 1996. Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. *AdvNursSci*, 16:1-8.
- Schultz, D.E. 2001. Marketers: Bid Farewell to Strategy Based on old 4 P's. *Marketing News*, 35(2):7.
- Schultz, D.E. & Schultz, H.F. 1998. Transitioning marketing communication into the twenty-first century. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 4(1):18.
- Schultz, D.E., Tannenbaum, S.I. & Lauterborn, R. 1994. Integrated Marketing Communications. Chicago, IL: NTC Publishing.
- Scovotti, C. & Spiller, L.D. 2006. Revisiting the conceptual definition of direct marketing: Perspectives from practitioners and scholars. *The Marketing Management Journal*, 16(2):189-199.
- Shankar, V. & Batra, R. 2009. The Growing Influence of Online Marketing Communications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23:285.
- Shankar, V. & Sridhar, B. 2009. Mobile Marketing: A Synthesis and Prognosis. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(2):118-29.
- Shimizu, K. 2009. Advertising Theory and Strategies. 16th edition. Souseisha Book Company. (Japanese).
- Shrimp, T. 2003. Advertising, promotion and supplemental aspects of integrated marketing communications. Belmont: Thomson South Western.

Smith, B.G. 2010. Social distributing public relations: Twitter, Haiti and interactivity in social media. *Public relations Review*, 36(4):33.

Smith, P.R.& Taylor, J.2004.Marketing communications: An integrated approach.London: Kogan Page.

Smith, P.R.1998. Marketing communication: an integrated approach. London: Kogan Page.

Smith, T.M., Gopalakrishna, S.& Smith, P.M. 2004. The complementary effect of trade shows on personal selling. *Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21:61-76.

Social Bakers. 2012. South Africa Facebook statistics.<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/south-africa>. Date of access: 27 Aug. 2012.

Solis, B. 2010. Engage!. New Jersey: Wiley.

Spanjaard, T.N.2008.Online social networks as a platform of branding/marketing.University of South Africa.(Dissertation – MA).

Spotts, H.E., Lambert, D.R. & Joyce, M.L.1998. Marketing Déjà vu: The discovery of integrated marketing communciations. *Journal of marketing education*, 20(3):215.

Sriram, S., Balachander, S. &Kalwani, M.U. 2007. Monitoring the dynamics of brand equity using store-level data. *Journal of Marketing*,71:65.

Sriram, V. & Sapienza, H.J. 1991.An empirical investigation of the role of marketing for small exporters. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 29(4):33-43.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J.M. 1998. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniquesand Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. 2nd ed. Springer, Berlin.

Susman, G.I. & Evered, R.D. 1978. An assessment of the scientific merits of action research.*Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23:582-603.

Szmigin, I. 2003. Understanding the consumer. London: Sage.

Tellis, G.J. 2005. Advertising's role in capitalist markets: What do we know and where do we go from here? *Journal of Advertising Research*, 45(3):168.

The World Assembly of Public Relations. 1978. Conference proceedings.

http://www.prii.ie/show_content.aspx?idcategory=11&idsubcategory=25 Date of access: 5 October 2012.

Thomas, H.2012.The Deal is in the Mail. *Response*, 20(9):25.

Thompson, C.B. & Walker, B.L.2000. Basics of Research (Part 12): Qualitative Research.*Air medical journal*, 17(2):66-67.

Thomson, O.P., Petty, N.J. & Ramage, C.M. 2011. Qualitative research: Exploring the multiple perspectives of osteopathy. *International Journal of Osteopathic Medicine*, 14:118.

Urban, G., Amyx, C.& Lorensen, A. 2009.Online Trust: State of the Art, New Frontiers, and Research Potential. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(2):179.

Van Heerden, C.H. & Cant, M.C.2010.Characteristics of social media.Marketing Management: A South African perspective. Cape Town: Juta.

Vermeulen, J.2012.Biggest social networks in South Africa.<http://mybroadband.co.za/news/internet/44061-biggest-social-networks-in-south-africa.html> Date of access: 27 Aug. 2012.

Vollmer, C. & Precourt, G. 2008. Always on: Advertising, marketing, and media in an era of consumer control. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Walsh, D. & Downe, S.2006. Appraising the quality of qualitative research. *Midwifery*, 22:115-116.

Wang, K.L. & Wang, J.T. 2009. Marketing mixes for digital products: a study of the marketspaces in China. *International Journal of Technology Marketing*, 4(1):18.

Waterschoot, W. & Can den Bulte, C.1993.The 4 P classification of the Marketing Mix revisited.*Journal of marketing*, 56:83.

Weber, L. 2009. Marketing to a social web. New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J. 2006. Action research: Living theory. Sage Publications Limited.

Whittaker, Z.2012.Facebook hits 1 billion active user milestone. http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-57525797-93/facebook-hits-1-billion-active-user-milestone/ Date of access: 13 Oct. 2012.

Whittemore, R., Chase, S.K. &Mandle, C.L. 2001.Validity in qualitative research. *Qual Health Res*, 11:526-535.

Winer, R.S. 2009.New Communication Approaches in Marketing: Issues and Research Directions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(2):108-17.

Withey, J.J. & Panitz, E.1995. Face-to-Face Selling: Making It More Effective.*Industrial Marketing Management*, 24:244.

Wolfe, D.B. 1998. Developmental relationship marketing (connecting messages with mind: an empathetic marketing system). *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 15(5):449.

Yoo, B., Donthu, N. & Lee, S. 2000. An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(2):202.

Yudelson, J. 1999. Adapting McCarthy's Four P's for the Twenty-first Century. *Journal of Marketing Education*,21(1):60.

Zarella, D. 2010. The social media marketing book. NorthSebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.

AnnexureA: Social networking term glossary

The following annexure is included as a reference for the social networking and social networking related terminology used throughout this study. As these are mostly terms with specific meanings within the context of professional social networking they are included in this annexure to ensure that a reader unfamiliar with social networking platforms and its workings fully comprehends all the possibly foreign terms. The definitions and descriptions of these terms are sourced from various online sources (see bibliography) whilst others are defined by the researcher himself in his degree as an experienced social networking manager and practitioner. It is noted that some of the terms used here are not directly used in the study, but are included as additional contextualisation of the social networking and its platforms.

A.1 Facebook related social networking terminology

Activity log

Similar to the timeline, the Facebook activity log for pages is a dedicated system that tracks all actions performed on a page by a page administrator.

Admin/ Administrator

An admin or administrator is a person who is in charge of a Facebook group or page. When you create a group/page, you are automatically listed as both an admin and the group's creator. Admins can invite people to join the group, appoint other admins, and edit group information and content. They can also remove members and other admins. Admins are also enabled to represent the brand when communicating messaging on social networking platforms that they are administrators of. Administrators can be provided with differing levels of control of a Facebook page.

Ads/advertising

A paid advertisement On Facebook. Users can create Facebook Ads to market their products and ideas. Standard Facebook ads are known as 'Marketplace ads' and advanced, higher costing ads are known as 'Premium ads'. Premium ads have added functionality and advertising options that set them apart.

Applications/apps

Users can add applications to their profiles, pages, and groups for increased functionality and visual appeal. There are thousands of ads to choose from. Some are built by Facebook. Most are built by external developers.

Campaign

A promotional activity (such as a competition or giveaway) that is hosted from a brand's Facebook page. There are strict guidelines in regards to how campaigns can be administered on a Facebook brand page.

Chat

Facebook's internal chat system allows users to converse in real-time or send offline users messages which they can read once they log on to Facebook in the future.

Comments

Facebook comments refer to the process of replying to a user or a page's status updates by means of providing verbal inputs to that status update. Whereas likes only allows users to Comments are also regarded as a prevalent social networking currency on Facebook.

Content Calendar/Schedule

A planned and times set of Facebook status updates intended for a Facebook brand page.

Cover photo/pic

A large dedicated visual area located on Facebook profiles and brand pages that can be used to communicate specific information. Facebook does however have specific restrictions on what type of content can be communicated on these areas.

Data capturing

Also used in regards to websites, data capturing is the process of collecting a Facebook user's personal details via a digital data form during a campaign or competition that is hosted by a brand on their Facebook page. Data is captured with the intention of utilising the data for future direct marketing opportunities.

Earned media Rate

A measurement used to determine the ROI (Return On Investment) of activities on Facebook. The Earned media rate is calculated by firstly assigning a monetary value to a single Facebook user being exposed to messaging of a brand page. Thereafter, this value is multiplied by the number of impressions (reach) a page received from Facebook users during a specific time period in order to calculate the Earned media rate.

Engagement or Engaged users

The number of Facebook users who clicked on a brand page status update.

Fan

A person who has joined a page because they like what that page represents. The amount of fans of a page is displayed in the form of 'likes'. Likes is one of Facebook's main 'currencies' and success metrics. As soon as a user likes a page, that user is automatically subscribed to the page's newsfeed and will consequently receive the brand's updates, unless that user specifically customizes his account settings as to not see the page's updates.

Fan gating

The act of limiting the audience of the content of canvas on a Facebook brand page so that only Facebook users who like the page have access to that content. Users who do not like the page and then visit the fan gated canvas will see different content and messaging from those users who do like the page.

Friend

A person who has connected with another Facebook user via their profile, usually by invitation. As soon as two users become friends on Facebook, they can start interacting and sharing information between each other. Facebook privacy settings can however be used to limit the interaction.

Group

A group is not a page or profile. It is a Facebook site created by brands, companies and other organizations to promote their activities. Facebook groups can either be 'open' (publicly viewable), 'closed' (Group's existence is public, but content can only be viewed by group members) or 'secret' (Only members can see the group and its content).

Insights

Facebook's answer to web page analysis and reporting tools, similar to Google Analytics. For each Facebook page, Insights tracks the number of page views, virality, reach, Talking about us, unique views, total interactions, wall posts, discussion topics, fans, new fans, removed fans (unlikes), photo views, video plays and other metrics that are referenced in order to assess the effectiveness and growth of a Facebook page. Facebook Insights is a flexible system, allowing social networking managers to specify the date ranges of data, making it a useful system for monthly and weekly professional social

networking reporting. Some of the most prevalent metrics that are included and referenced within the Facebook insights control panel are Reach, Engagement, Talking about this and Virality.

Landing page

Also used when referring to websites, the concept of a landing page on Facebook refers to the first visual set of messaging that a user gets exposed to when visiting a canvas on a Facebook page.

Likes

A feature that appears as a link next to something you see on Facebook that allows users to let others know they appreciate that something, whether it be a video, a comment or something else. Likes are one way of measuring value on Facebook and regarded as the main 'social currency' on the platform (See Facebook Insights).

Linking

The process of adding a web link to a Facebook status update so that the status update links to another location, either located on Facebook or an external site.

Messages

Facebook's internal messaging service allows pages and Facebook users to converse in the form of private, one-on-one conversations. Brand pages cannot however initiate these private conversations and the request must come from the user's side. However, Facebook pages are free to converse with users via the message thread once a Facebook user initiates a message thread.

Milestones

A system reserved for Facebook pages that allows brands to update their page timeline with an update that signifies an important event in the history of the brand. Once a milestone is added, the milestone will be viewable in the Timeline of the page, under the date specified when the milestone was first created.

Newsfeed

News Feeds highlight what's happening in your social circles on Facebook. The Facebook newsfeed shows you posts from a Facebook user's friends (people that you are connected to) as well as brand pages in real-time. Users can control which users and pages' content appears on their newsfeed.

Notifications

An internal Facebook system that keeps track of all the Facebook related activities directly related to a specific user or a specific brand page. For businesses, the notifications system acts as a useful alert system for the interactions of Facebook users on their brand pages.

Offers

A paid service for Facebook pages that allows brands to market sales promotions related to specific product or service offerings directly from Facebook.

Page

A page is not the same as a Facebook personal profile. The features and capabilities are different and in general, more varied on pages. It is a Facebook site intended for and created by artists, musical groups, celebrities, businesses, brands and similar entities.

Profile

A profile is a personal site dedicated to a specific Facebook user. It is a Facebook site intended for and created by people who want to share information about themselves and socialize with others. A profile displays a user's personal information and their interactions with friends.

Profile pic/photo

A dedicated, personalised visual area located on Facebook profiles and brand pages that can be customized.

Reach

The number of unique people who were exposed to a specific post of the page or the page in general within a certain time period.

Scheduled posts

The act of scheduling a Facebook status update to be made on a page so that it is initiated in the future or dated as being posted in the past.

Shares

Similar to likes, Facebook shares is a method of showing appreciation for other users and pages' status updates and content. By 'sharing' a status updated from another page or user, that status update is

duplicated on the user's own Facebook Timeline, effectively spreading its reach to its own social networking subscribers.

Status update

A micro-blogging feature which allows users to inform their friends of their current whereabouts, actions, or thoughts. Status updates can also be made from brand pages and serves as the basis of communication on the Facebook platform. Written status updates can either be accompanied by photos, videos or sound. It is common practice to include rich media to status updates as a method of increasing the engagement of updates

Tabs/canvas

Tabs mark the different sections of a profile. They can either contain custom user created info or Facebook standard info. Canvasses or tabs provide brands with the opportunity to customize their Facebook pages to their liking, including brand specific information by means of rich media (video, sound, animation etc.) which would otherwise not be viewable on a Facebook page. It is also common practice to administer and host Facebook competitions and campaigns via Facebook canvassed and tabs. Because of the rich media content displayed on these canvasses, some devices (certain mobile devices) do not support the viewing of content on these canvasses. This means that brands need to accommodate their Facebook page fans who cannot view the info on these canvasses by also including them as page updates or on external sites or platforms.

Tag/Tagging

Marking a status update, video or photo with text that identifies the image or the person in the image. Users can use Facebook privacy settings to control permit/allow other users to tag them in updates and content.

Talking About This

'Talking About This' is a consolidated Facebook metric that combines and measures three different forms of Facebook interaction, namely 'likes', 'comments' and 'shares'. The total number of likes, shares and comments that a status update made via a brand page receive equals the 'Talking About This' total. When measuring the 'Talking About This' total of the page, the metric relates to the number of unique Facebook page users who have liked, shared or commented on one or more of a brand's Facebook page status updates within a 7 day time period.

Virality

The percentage of Facebook users who liked, shared or commented on a brand page's status updates out of the total number of unique Facebook users who were exposed to the status update.

Voice

The Voice refers to the identity from which a user is currently interacting with on Facebook. This system can be used to distinguish between actions performed by the brand page itself and the actions of the page administrator.

Wall/ Timeline

A featured section inside a Facebook profile or page. This space on every user's profile page or every brand page allows friends and users themselves to post messages for all to see. Recently, the Facebook wall has been replaced with the Facebook Timeline, an updated, more feature-rich version of the Facebook Wall. Brands can control which posts can be publicly viewed on their timeline and customise the way in which content is displayed here. As the name suggests, the Facebook Timeline orders content posted according to dates, providing a historic record of a user or brand's Facebook.

A.2 Twitter terminology

@ sign

The '@' sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets, for example: "Hello @Twitter!". When a username/handle is preceded by the @ sign, it becomes a link to a Twitter profile. It is equivalent to the tagging function on Facebook.

Ads/advertising

A paid advertisement On Twitter. Users can create Twitter users can use ads to market their products and ideas to a larger audience, further extended their original follower base.

Applications/apps

Users can add applications to their Twitter accounts for increased functionality and visual appeal. Most apps are built by external developers.

Avatar

The personal image uploaded to your Twitter profile in the settings tab of your account. This image identifies you on Twitter.

Background image

A dedicated visual aspect on all Twitter accounts that can be customized with visual messaging. Brands can use this area to inform users or promote a certain idea.

Bio

A short personal description of 160 characters or fewer used to define who you are on Twitter.

Campaign

A promotional activity (such as a competition or giveaway) that is hosted from a brand's Twitter account. Twitter is much more lenient in regards to the administration of competitions on their platform than Facebook.

Content Calendar/Schedule

A planned and times set of Twitter Tweets intended for a Twitter brand account.

Direct Message (DM)

Also called a DM and most recently called simply a 'message', these Tweets are private between the sender and recipient. Tweets sent over SMS become DMs when they begin with 'd username' to specify who the message is for.

Feed

A list of tweets tweeted by a Twitter user's followers and is updated in real-time.

Follow

To follow someone on Twitter is to subscribe to their Tweets or updates on the site. Twitter users can prevent certain other users from following them if they choose to.

Follower

A follower is another Twitter user who has followed your Twitter account.

Following

Your following number reflects the quantity of other Twitter users you have chosen to follow on the site, in other words, those users who Twitter messaging you are subscribed to. Following can also refer to the act of following another user on Twitter.

Hashtag (#)

The '#' symbol is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users. Hashtags are an effective way of organising content on Twitter, making it easy to search for tweets related to a specific subject matter on the platform. They can be used by brands to monitor conversations around certain topics as well as administer a Twitter campaign or competition.

Header

A dedicated visual aspect on all Twitter accounts that can be customized with visual messaging that is smaller than the Twitter background. Brands can use this area to inform users or promote a certain idea.

Interactions

A navigation section in Twitter displaying all ways other users have interacted with your account, like adding you to a list, sending you a @reply, marking one of your Tweets as a Favourite, retweeting one of your Tweets.

Lists

Curated groups of other Twitter users and used to tie specific individuals into a group on your Twitter account. These listings are visible to other Twitter users and can be useful in organising your follower base.

Promoted Tweets

Tweets that selected businesses have paid to promote at the top of search results on Twitter.

Reply

A public Tweet posted in reply to another user's message, usually posted by clicking the 'reply' button next to their Tweet in your timeline. Always begins with '@username'. Twitter replies are equivalent to the 'commenting' functionality used on Facebook.

Retweet (noun) RT

A public Tweet by another user, forwarded to you by someone you follow. Often used to spread news or share valuable findings on Twitter.

Retweet (verb) RT

To retweet, retweeting, retweeted. The act of forwarding another user's Tweet to all of your followers. Retweets is equivalent to the 'sharing' and 'like' functionality used on Facebook.

Linking

The process of adding a web link to a Tweet on Twitter so that the tweet links to another location, either located on Twitter or an external site.

Mention

Mentioning another user in your Tweet by including the '@' sign followed directly by their username is called a 'mention'. Also refers to Tweets in which your username was included. Mentioning is equivalent to the 'tagging' functionality used on Facebook.

Trending Topic

A subject algorithmically determined to be one of the most popular on Twitter at the moment. These can also be pinpointed to a specific geographical area.

Tweet (verb)

Tweet, tweeting, tweeted. The act of posting a message, often called a 'Tweet', on Twitter. This is equivalent to the 'status update' functionality used on Facebook.

Tweet (noun)

A message posted via Twitter containing 140 characters or fewer.

Tweeter

An account holder on Twitter who posts and reads Tweets. Also known as 'Twitterers'.

Unfollow

To cease following another Twitter user. Their Tweets no longer show up in your home timeline.

Username

Also known as a Twitter handle. Must be unique and contain fewer than 15 characters. It is used to identify you on Twitter for replies and mentions. Your username is also connected to your unique Twitter account URL.

Verified Accounts

These are Twitter accounts that have been verified by Twitter to be the official Twitter handle of a specific brand or well-known person. Twitter verifies accounts in order to prevent identity theft on the platform.

A.3 Bibliography

Facebook. 2012. Facebook: Glossary of terms. Date of access: 3 October 2012. <https://www.facebook.com/help/glossary>

twitter. 2012. The Twitter Glossary. Date of access: 3 October 2012. <http://support.twitter.com>

Annexure B: Written and visual sampling source

B.1 Acer Space Renewed Challenge social networking platform updates (13 March 2012 – 18 April 2012)

B.1.1 Written updates – Facebook

Written messaging transmitted on the Acer Africa Facebook page in the form of page status updates during the campaign time period (13 March 2012 – 18 April 2012):

Date Posted	Post Message
13 March 2012	Our next major Facebook competition is just around the corner and it promises to be the best and most fun thing we've ever done on social networking – More info to follow soon...
14 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: You can add any library or folder to the Favourites section in Windows Explorer. To add a folder, navigate to it in Explorer, right-click Favourites in the left navigation pane and select Add current location to Favourites.
15 March 2012	COMPETITION: Stand the chance to win a range of premium Acer products to the value of R60,000! All you have to do is get the fastest time in our 'Space Renewed Challenge' – Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
15 March 2012	One day into the competition and our Space Renewed Challenge has already started to heat up! Currently, Shelby Green is leading the pack with an amazing time of '01:54:32' – Do you think you can beat her? https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
16 March 2012	Stand the chance to win an Acer H7 Series Full HD Projector, All-in-one Z5 PC, S3 Ultrabook and Iconia W501 Tablet – That's a combined value of more than R60,000! Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
18 March 2012	Good morning fans! Congrats to our current Space Renewed leaderboard front runner Josh Markowitz, with an incredible time of 01:36:92! It seems that Josh was made to play games, just like the upcoming Acer Timeline Ultra M3! Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120

19 March 2012	Space Renewed challenge: Got a friend you would like to challenge to try and beat your fastest time? Tag them in a comment to this post to invite them to a digital duel – Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
20 March 2012	Geek Fact of the week: Tetris has sold over 40 million copies worldwide, since it began in 1982. That provided the creator 800 million in revenues – What do you think of the games in our Space Renewed Challenge? Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
20 March 2012	The competition in our Space Renewed Challenge is really heating up – Do you think you'll be able to beat the current quickest time? Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
20 March 2012	How are you celebrating Human rights day? Hope it's a good one!
21 March 2012	Space Renewed Challenge: What's your favourite part of our interactive game? We need to confess we love the 'Shoot and Reveal Challenge' – Enter here for a chance to win R60,000 worth of Acer products: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
22 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: Whether you're at the office, library, or cafe, it's always a good idea to lock Windows before you step away. To lock Windows quickly, press Windows Logo+L.
23 March 2012	Complete the phrase: I want to win a series of premium Acer products because _____.Enter here for your chance: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
26 March 2012	Here's our latest radio ad – Have you heard it on the radio yet? Click here to enter our Space Renewed Challenge: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
26 March 2012	Have you already imagined how amazing your home would look with a series of brand new Acer devices? Remember to enter our Space Renewed Challenge here to make that dream come true: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120

28 March 2012	Space Renewed Challenge: To say that we're blown away by Adrian Benwell's new best time of 01:15:93 is an understatement! Ben, what's your secret? Enter here if you think you can beat his time – a series of Acer products to the value of R60,000 can be yours: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
28 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: Windows 7 does not place a link to your videos on the Start Menu by default. To add a link to your videos on the Start Menu, right-click Start, select Properties, click on Customize. In the Videos section at the bottom, choose Display as a link.
29 March 2012	Big up to the Orlando Pirates who defeated the Free State Stars with a convincing score of 3-1 last night! Acer Africa is a proud sponsor of the Orlando Pirates Football Club.
29 March 2012	What's the most difficult game in our Space Renewed Challenge? Enter here for a chance to win R60,000 worth of Acer products: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120
30 March 2012	Geek fact of the week: Over 6,000 new computer viruses are released every month.
30 March 2012	Hope you have a great weekend – Made any special plans for the upcoming long weekend yet?
02 April 2012	Introducing The Aspire Timeline Ultrabook M3 – available in Incredible Connection stores from today: http://ow.ly/a181F
02 April 2012	We thought we had witnessed the fastest time possible, but Adrian Benwell has proven us all wrong with an amazing time of 01:09:88 – Well done! Enter here to try and beat his time for R60 000 worth of Acer products that will transform your home into a digital masterpiece: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
02 April 2012	Like this status if you've ever screamed of pure excitement for getting a better time in our Space Renewed Challenge – Enter here for a chance to win R60 000 worth of premium Acer products: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
03 April 2012	An informative article on Acer Africa's vision: "We have a very clear road-map on tablets going forward and will have a strong range offer on Android and Windows 8."
04 April 2012	Check out these great deals on Acer products from the following

	retail outlets.
04 April 2012	Windows 7 tip: You can rearrange icons on the taskbar as you wish and start new (or switch to running) instances of the first ten taskbar programs using Win+1, Win+2, and so on.
05 April 2012	Have you taken a look at the prizes up for grabs in our Space Renewed Challenge? The All-in-One Z5 PC impresses with brilliant touch screen technology, modern minimalist design and turbo-charged performance – Enter here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
05 April 2012	It's long weekend – Like this status if you look forward to this welcome break!
06 April 2012	To all our fans that celebrate Easter, we would like to wish you a prosperous and blessed time.
09 April 2012	There's exactly one week left to enter our 'Space Renewed Challenge' for a chance to win R60 000 worth of premium Acer products. Enter via a PC here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
10 April 2012	Today's featured product, the ultra-fast and ultra-slim Aspire S3 Ultrabook is but one of the products up for grabs in our Space Renewed Challenge – Enter here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
10 April 2012	Which of your friends would do really well in our Space Renewed Challenge? Tag them as a comment here to prove your confidence in their gaming skills – Enter here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
10 April 2012	Can you imagine the Aspire H7531D Home Projection system in your living room? Enhanced colour technologies, smart signal detection and complete digital connectivity makes this device irresistible – Stand the chance to win one in our 'Space Renewed Challenge' here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
11 April 2012	Have you gotten back into the swing of things or are you already yearning for the next long weekend?
12 April 2012	The Iconia tab w500 gives you the best features of a PC and Tablet in one clever and stylish device – Enter our Space Renewed Challenge for a chance to win one, as well as three other premium Acer products here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
12 April 2012	When I look at the Aspire S5 Ultrabook, I am filled with _____.
13 April 2012	It's Friday the 13th – Are you at all superstitious on days like these?

13 April 2012	This is your last weekend to try and beat our current Space Renewed Challenge leader, Adrian Benwell. Up for grabs is an amazing set of Acer products (Ultrabook, Tablet, Projector, PC) worth R60,000 – Can it be done? Enter here: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
16 April 2012	After hours of replays to get a better time, our Space Renewed Challenge is now officially closed. We're currently reviewing all entries, after which we will contact the verified winner. Thanks to all who participated!
17 April 2012	Windows 7 tip: Press Windows and T, and you move the focus to the left-most icon on the taskbar. Then use your arrow keys to change the focus to other icons, and you get a live preview of every window.
17 April 2012	The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry are set to give the Olympic Torch relay a royal welcome when it visits Buckingham Palace on the way to the start of the London 2012 Games.
18 April 2012	We're proud to announce Robin Venter from Durban as the winner in our Space Renewed Challenge – Your set of premium Acer products are on their way! Thanks again to all who took the time to enter and compete.

B.1.2 Written updates – Twitter

Written messaging transmitted on the Acer Africa Twitter account in the form of tweets during the campaign time period:

Date Posted	Tweet message content type
14 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: When you want to permanently delete a file, press Shift+Delete, then Shift+Enter to confirm
14 March 2012	Our next Facebook competition is on the horizon... great prizes to be won! http://www.facebook.com/acerafrica
15 March 2012	One day into the challenge and the competition is already heating up! Currently, Shelby Green is leading with '01:54:32'...

15 March 2012	COMPETITION: Stand the chance to win a range of premium Acer products to the value of R60,000! – Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
16 March 2012	Stand the chance to win an Acer H7 Series Full HD Projector, All-in-one Z5 PC, S3 Ultrabook and Iconia W501 Tablet https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
19 March 2012	Congrats to our new Space Renewed leaderboard front runner Josh Markowitz, with an amazing time of 01:36:92.Enter here https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
20 March 2012	What do you think is the secret to getting the quickest time in our digital intervention competition? Enter here https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
20 March 2012	Geek fact of the day: On an average work day, a typist's fingers travel 12.6 miles.
21 March 2012	Happy Human Rights day to all of our fans! How are you spending the day?
22 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: To rename multiple files, highlight the files you want to rename, then hit the F2 key. Rename the first file, then hit Enter
22 March 2012	Congratulations to our current leader, Isabel Venter, with a time of 01:25:53! That's really impressive, well done! https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
23 March 2012	GEEK FACT OF THE DAY: It was decided that a CD should be long enough to hold Beethoven's Ninth Symphony which was precisely 72 minutes.
26 March 2012	Have you challenged your friends yet to try and beat your score in our Space Renewed challenge? Great prizes to be won https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
26 March 2012	What do you think of our latest radio ad? http://soundcloud.com/acerafrica/acer-africa-radio-ad-march ...
27 March 2012	Complete the phrase: I deserve to win the Acer Space Renewed challenge because _____. Enter here: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
28 March 2012	Acer Iconia Tab A200 Review http://ow.ly/9VLkx
28 March 2012	What prize in the Space Renewed Challenge are you most excited for? The All-in-one PC, Projector, Tablet or Ultrabook? https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...

29 March 2012	Windows 7 tip: Locate a file on your hard drive that you want to email, right-click the file and click Send To, and add a mail recipient.
29 March 2012	Is there one game that you find really difficult to complete in our Space Renewed Challenge? Great prizes to be won! https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
30 March 2012	How are you going to make sure this weekend is awesome?
30 March 2012	Have you played all of the games in our Space Renewed Challenge? Which is your favourite? https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
02 April 2012	We thought we had witnessed the fastest time possible, but Adrian Benwell has proven us all wrong...Enter here to win: http://ow.ly/a1zlv
02 April 2012	Introducing The Aspire Timeline Ultrabook M3 – available in Incredible Connection stores from today: http://ow.ly/a181F
03 April 2012	An informative article on Acer Africa's vision http://ow.ly/a2VTD
03 April 2012	Retweet this status if you think you have a chance of winning our Space Renewed Challenge.
04 April 2012	Windows 7 tip: Windows 7 now provides a standard way to switch your display from one monitor to another, or a projector – just press Win+P
04 April 2012	Check out these great deals on Acer products from the following retail outlets https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.359090714133672.77998.154601907915888&type=1 ... Where do you buy your Acer products?
05 April 2012	Looking forward to the long weekend? Retweet this status if you are.
05 April 2012	Fancy yourself a professional gamer? Show the 'noobs' how it's done for the chance to win a range of Acer products http://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
06 April 2012	Here's hoping our followers that celebrate Easter have a splendid Good Friday!
09 April 2012	Retweet this preview of the S5 Ultrabook if you're excited about its launch later this year http://news.cnet.com/8301-17938_105-57402743-1/ultrabook-with-game-acer-aspire-timeline-ultra-m3-581tg-hands-on/ ...
10 April 2012	There's only room for serious contenders in our Space Renewed Facebook Challenge – R60 000 of Acer products to be won http://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
10 April 2012	Do you like playing games on the web? Well, then you'll love our latest competition with the chance to win big

	prizes https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
11 April 2012	Any special mid-week plans for tonight?
11 April 2012	Would you like to have your own Acer top-class projector? Play our 'Space Renewed challenge' for a chance to win onehttps://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
12 April 2012	Do you prefer tablets over PC devices? An Ultrabook, like the Aspire S5 and S3 has the power of a PC, with the mobility of a tablet.
12 April 2012	Not much time left to enter our Space Renewed Challenge – R60, 000 worth of Acer products to be won: https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
13 April 2012	This is your last weekend to try and beat our current competition leader. A set of Acer products worth R60,000 to win https://www.facebook.com/acerafrica/app_208195102528120 ...
13 April 2012	What scares you most about Friday the 13th or aren't you scared to begin with?
16 April 2012	Entries for our Space Renewed Challenge closes @13:00 today – Enter for a final chance to win here http://ow.ly/a1zlv
17 April 2012	Windows 7 tip: The new and improved Windows 7 magnifier offers a much easier way to zoom in on any area of the screen.
17 April 2012	With the opening ceremony just over 100 days away, Sebastian Coe is working on the final touches for London Olympics http://businessmirror.com.ph/home/sports/25926-london-marks-100-day-launch-of-the-2012-olympic-games ...
18 April 2012	Robin Venter from Durban is the winner in our Space Renewed Challenge – Your set of premium Acer products are on their way!

B.1.3. Visual & verbal (Facebook)

The following visual elements that included a verbal messaging element were incorporated into the campaign.

A series of paid advertising on Facebook:

Acer Africa



Can you complete our challenge in the fastest time? Major bragging rights as well as Acer products to the value of R60 000 to be won!

Acer Africa



How fast do you think you can beat our exciting and fun time trial? An Acer Projector, PC, Ultrabook and Tablet is up for grabs!

Acer Africa



Become an online celebrity by finishing our exciting time challenge in the fastest time – R60,000 worth of Acer products to be won!

Acer Africa



The ultra-slim, ultra-smart and ultra-fast S3 Ultrabook is one of four Acer products up for grabs in our new competition – Play now!

Image B.1: The Facebook marketplace ads that were implemented for promotion of the competition.

The main landing page of the Space Renewed Challenge:



Acer recommends Windows® 7

Stand a chance to WIN a complete Digital Home Makeover in our SPACERENEWED CHALLENGE

For one lucky winner, your digital lifestyle dreams will come true with a complete prize package of first class Acer products, valued at **R60,000!** Your home will be transformed into a digital masterpiece that lets you easily manage, store, share and enjoy your media from any device, in any room, and on the go!

The following prize bundle is up for grabs: H7 Series Full HD Projector, All-in-one Z5 PC, Aspire S3 Ultrabook and an Iconia W501 Tablet.



Click on the different rooms of the house to learn more about each PRIZE. You'll find helpful info to help you complete the time trial.



[VIEW THE LEADERBOARD](#)





HOW TO ENTER

We have created a series of fun challenges for you to complete and share with your friends to stand the chance of winning these awesome prizes. It's so simple! The one to complete the four challenges in the fastest time, will be crowned the ultimate winner of the Acer prize package.



- + ASPIRE S3
- + ICONIA TAB W500
- + ASPIRE Z5801
- + ASPIRE H7531D

START THE CHALLENGE

Image B.2: The main landing page of the Acer Space Renewed Challenge canvas on Facebook. The messaging on this page introduced users to the campaign and competition whilst also describing the prizes and explaining the competition mechanics. Users were required to enter the competition from this canvas, hosted on the Acer Africa Facebook page.

A series of product related page, accessible from the main campaign canvas:

Acer recommends Windows® 7

acer

ASPIRE S3

READY WHEN YOU ARE

Enjoy life on the go in an instant with the Aspire S Series - Acer's most mobile and responsive notebook ever. This techno-wonder comes in an ultra-aerodynamic, super-slim design, yet delivers everything you expect from a standard-size notebook.

Featuring Windows 7. Your PC, simplified.

BENEFITS **PHOTOS** **VIDEOS**

Ultra-fast responsiveness

Acer Green Instant will bring it back to life in less than 2 seconds! And, with Acer Instant Connect, the Aspire S Series quickly reconnects to your most-used access points, so you can get on the Internet 4X faster!

Ultra-slim design

The Aspire S Series is razor-thin and featherlight, at just 13 mm (0.51") slim and under 1.4 kg. The aluminum case adds to the sleek look and feel, while protecting the LCD and making the Aspire S Series extra strong and durable.

Ultra-smart performance

The embedded lithium-polymer battery can last up to 72, 7 hours on a single charge, so you get great mobile freedom. Behind the scenes is a 2nd generation Intel® Core™ processor that enables speedier multitasking.

Ultra-seamless connectivity

Video chat anytime, anywhere with anyone you wish with the Acer Crystal Eye 1.3 MP HD webcam. Browse and connect all you want with Wi-Fi® and share everything you have via Acer clear.fil.

Image B.3: *The Aspire S3 Ultrabook product canvas for the Acer Space Renewed Challenge: One of the four product information page canvasses that promoted each of the competition prizes and also educated users on their features and capabilities.*

A uniform structure and visual style was used for these product canvasses – examples of the other product canvasses are displayed below:



Image B.4 and B.5: *The Iconia Tablet W500 and Aspire All-in-one PC product canvasses, following the uniform look and feel discussed in image 5.3.*

 LEADER BOARD	
Adrian Benwell	01:09:88
Adam Kinder	01:13:24
Junaid Jamal	01:14:42
Lisa Oosthuizen	01:18:83
Chris Keogh	01:24:62
Isabel Venter	01:25:53
Bianca van Antwerpen	01:26:75

Image B.6: *The Space Renewed Challenge Leaderboard. These rankings were updated in real-time as users achieved better times that increased their overall ranking in the game standings.*



Image B.7: *The first of a series of 4 game pages, which users had to complete in order to be eligible for the competition prizes. Messaging on this page included instructions on how to play the game. As with*

the product pages, the game pages were designed and developed with uniformity in mind – Two other game pages are displayed below as to illustrate:



Image B.8 and B.9: The second and third game pages of the Acer space Renewed Challenge. Each of the game pages/stages followed the same uniform structure.

acer

Windows 7
Acer recommends Windows 7

Thank you for competing in the Acer SPACERENEWED CHALLENGE

Please fill in the form below to complete the challenge:

Name: *

Surname: *

Mobile: *

Email: *

City: *

SUBMIT ENTRY

YOUR FINAL TIME
02:46:45

00:28:22

00:51:33

00:23:31

Image B.10: Once all the levels were completed, users were congratulated for completing the challenge and asked to submit their details. Once submitted, users were entered into the game system, with their time recorded and added to the leaderboard if applicable – Users needed to achieve one of the fastest game completion times for their entries to be displayed on the leaderboard. The capturing of user details were also utilised for future marketing scenarios of direct marketing via email.



Image B.11: The above Facebook cover pic was implemented during the campaign in order to promote the campaign.

B.2 Acer and FNB joint campaign social networking platform updates (26 September 2012 – 6 November 2012)

B.2.1 Written updates – Facebook

Date Posted	Post Message
26 September 2012	Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint – Which is the most useful and why?
26 September 2012	What happens when you stick a jet rocket to the powerful Ultrabook S5? Find out here: http://aspire5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA/
27 September 2012	Keep Windows running at optimum efficiency: Disk space manager utilities, like Tree Size are great for getting an idea of which folders on your hard drive are taking up the most space. Freeing up space is an easy way of giving your PC a bit of a boost.
1 October 2012	When choosing an Ultrabook or Notebook, which do you consider first – Performance or aesthetic appeal?
1 October 2012	Saturday Girl SA reviews the S3 Ultrabook: "The Aspire S3 is truly designed to meet notebook users' needs, combining essential features of

	the smartphone and tablet PC, such as fast startup and Internet connectivity, with long battery life." Read the full review here: http://ow.ly/e7tiV Kristi Agier - Photographer and Illustrator
2 October 2012	The Ultrabook S5 – Exclusive to Rectron.
2 October 2012	Calling all students worldwide! Have you checked out the 'Acer Incredible Green Contest'? The idea is to create innovative and sustainable solutions that promote a better and greener living environment. Finalists will be selected to compete for Grand Prize of US\$60,000 and be provided with a complementary trip to Taipei for COMPUTEX 2013.
3 October 2012	Microsoft recently announced that on the 26th of October will we not only witness the launch of Windows 8, but MSN will also launch a totally new look!
3 October 2012	Acer Flashback: Remember when big and bulky Acer Aspire Desktops roamed the earth? Now, we have the Aspire X Series at about one-third the size. Here's a 1996 commercial to take you back.
4 October 2012	If you could create the ultimate Windows PC, what would you include in your setup?
4 October 2012	Are you ready for the weekend of weekends for all true South African geeks? The annual rAge Expo kicks off tomorrow and we have to admit we're very excited! What's your favourite LAN PC game and why?
5 October 2012	We love to hear from our fans, so that's why we want to know what you think of the content of our Facebook page – Is there anything you would like to see more or less of?
8 October 2012	Review: "For the intended business user, Acer's TravelMate P6 is a very functional and versatile laptop. It offers a good balance of long battery life and processing power, and the comprehensive range of ports and expansion possibilities will make it useful for a wide variety of applications." Read the full review here: http://ow.ly/eicKK
8 October 2012	Sifiso Myeni has been named the September Player of the Month as voted by you - the supporters. Congratulations to Lolo Modjadji who has won himself a notebook courtesy of Acer.
9 October 2012	Need to reset your Acer PC back to its original factory default settings?

	This series of support videos can help...
9 October 2012	Fill in the blank: My favourite feature of the Acer Aspire S5 Ultrabook is _____.
10 October 2012	The Iconia W700 includes a cradle that not only acts as a tablet stand but contains extra connectors as well. Read more on this amazing device here: http://ow.ly/ema38
10 October 2012	In their review of the Acer Aspire V5 171-6867 Notebook, SlashGear asks, "Do you need the lightweight and small size?" then answers, "If so, this is the notebook for you."
11 October 2012	Sporting a gem-cut form factor, the Veriton N series machines are small enough to affix to the back of a monitor for an all-in-one experience: http://ow.ly/eo9jW
11 October 2012	Did you know that you can buy Acer products at reduced rates from FNB?
12 October 2012	Acer Debuts Aspire M5 Ultrabooks With Touch and All-Day Battery Life – Read more at http://ow.ly/eq19l
12 October 2012	We're excited to announce that beginning today you can reserve your copy of Windows 8 Pro and Pre-Order Windows 8 PCs! (plus a first look at the packaging) http://bit.ly/TkLITY
15 October 2012	Are you ready for Windows 8?
15 October 2012	Here's a question for our artistic page fans – Do you do design work exclusively on PC devices or do you sometimes use mobile devices like notebooks and Ultrabooks?
16 October 2012	The V3 Series keeps you ahead of digital trends with its timeless style and sharp computing in 14", 15.6" and 17.3" models.
16 October 2012	Complete the following: The best aspect of Acer's Ultrabook range is _____.
17 October 2012	Laptop Magazine got their hands on our upcoming Acer Iconia W700, stating, "Think of it as an Ultrabook without the keyboard..." Read the full preview here: http://ow.ly/extu9
17 October 2012	TravelMate P243
18 October 2012	How many squares can you see amongst all these Ultrabooks?

18 October 2012	We are very excited today as we are launching the first ever Orlando Pirates Learning Centre, supported by Acer for Education – more pics to follow soon...
18 October 2012	What do you think is a suitable size hard drive for an Ultrabook? The powerful and fast Ultrabook S5 has a generously sized solid state drive of 256GB – Find out more here: http://aspire5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA
19 October 2012	Acer satisfies customer demands through innovative thinking, always seeking ways to put our creativity to optimal use and provide customers with cutting edge technology. Find out more here: http://ow.ly/eBfQ9
19 October 2012	Acer holds the number one position for notebooks across Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) with a market share of 20 per cent. Read the full article here: http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IT_224157.html
22 October 2012	What do you think of the Acer tagline? Hit share if it speaks to you or comment to let us know what you think.
22 October 2012	Acer Appoints Regeneris
23 October 2012	The Orlando Pirates Learning Centre Supported By Acer
23 October 2012	Which of the following Acer products is your favourite? Like: S3, Comment: M3 or Share: V3
24 October 2012	DID YOU KNOW? The multi-gesture touchpad on your Acer Notebook, Ultrabook or Netbook gives you the power of one-handed management — swirl to navigate, rotate photos, pinch to zoom, and flick through content?
24 October 2012	The Orlando Pirates Learning Centre Supported By Acer
25 October 2012	One day till the launch of Windows 8 – Share if you're as excited as us!
25 October 2012	Acer T272HL bmidz Touch Screen Monitor
26 October 2012	"Windows 8 PCs are the best PCs ever."
29 October 2012	Can you imagine a powerful Ultrabook like the S5 only being 11mm thin and 1.2kg light? You better believe it: http://aspire5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA/
29 October 2012	Share this pic if you can't wait to hit the beach this summer!
30 October 2012	Come see the new, redesigned Acer.co.za, showcasing the latest lineup of Windows 8 products, product videos, photos and content! The new

	responsive design makes browsing by touch tablet and mobile phone even easier. Explore beyond limits...and follow this link: http://www.acer.co.za/ac/en/ZA/content/home
30 October 2012	We have a new Hollywood actress leading our new campaign. Introducing Megan Fox and the Acer Aspire S7 Ultrabook... Oh and Zenya the dolphin!
30 October 2012	Here it is. See how the Acer Aspire S7 helped transform Megan Fox...
31 October 2012	Complete the following: My personal highlight of October was _____.
31 October 2012	The All-New Acer.com
1 November 2012	Tell FNB the most creative thing you could do with the Acer Aspire V3-571 on their "Device Give-away" tab here: http://on.fb.me/RoOQsb and you could win an Acer Aspire Notebook!
1 November 2012	The Iconia A puts everything you need into the very palm of your hand. Had a long day? Use its Android operating system to search, communicate, shop and work from the comfort of your couch.
2 November 2012	What do you think of the brand new Aspire S7? http://www.acer.com/aspires7/en_ZA/
2 November 2012	Check out the video we shot behind the scenes, of the Acer Aspire S7 campaign. With Megan Fox, and some dolphins..
5 November 2012	We'll be introducing a number of new Windows 8 touch products, including our Acer Aspire S7 Ultrabook, ICONIA W7 & W5 Tablets and Aspire U Series All-in-One. Learn how Windows 8 makes them better here: http://windows.microsoft.com/en-ZA/windows-8/meet?ocid=GA8_O_WOL_Hero_Home_Intro8_Null
5 November 2012	Personalise your Acer product with these unique accessories. Pick your item by series and item and customise your Acer product to suit your style and lifestyle: http://www.acer.co.za/ac/en/ZA/content/group/options
6 November 2012	We always love to hear from satisfied Acer fans – Martin Chapusa from Botswana shared this with us: "Here I am with my brand new machine, the Acer Aspire V3-551! My previous machine is still around the Acer Aspire 5520G, I am an AMD fan, so it had to be this new machine for me. I am happy to say that it costs

	half the price of an i7 and the graphics are superb. I am able to run 64bit AutoCAD, Archicad and rendering software Artlantis! it runs like a dream!"
6 November 2012	Acer ICONIA W7 Series Tablet

B.2.2 Written updates – Twitter

Date Posted	Post Message
26 September 2012	Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint – Which is the most useful and why?
27 September 2012	Fun fact: The first "mouse" was created in 1963 and was made of wood pic.twitter.com/7G2RFyHo
28 September 2012	We all make mistakes... pic.twitter.com/NdDHE3nb
1 October 2012	When choosing an Ultrabook or Notebook, which do you consider first – Performance or aesthetic appeal? pic.twitter.com/K0IH3aaR
1 October 2012	@saturdaygirlsa reviews the Ultrabook S3 – Photo: Kristi Agier - Photographer http://saturdaygirlsa.blogspot.com/2012/09/acer-aspire-s3-utlra-book-review.html ... pic.twitter.com/mR7kKU2j
2 October 2012	The Ultrabook S5 – Exclusive to Rectron pic.twitter.com/Br352Bya
3 October 2012	Microsoft recently announced that on 26 October will we not only witness the launch of Windows 8, but MSN will also sport a brand new look!
4 October 2012	Are you ready for the weekend of weekends for all true South African geeks? The annual rAge Expo kicks off tomorrow pic.twitter.com/Bc46zadr
5 October 2012	We love to hear from our fans, so that's why we want to know what you think of the content on our Twitter handle?
8 October 2012	Review: "For the business user, Acer's TravelMate P6 is a very functional and versatile laptop." http://ow.ly/eicKK pic.twitter.com/0ixnhGKX
9 October 2012	Need to reset your Acer PC back to its original factory default settings? This series of support videos can help http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4064B13B195155D3&feature=plcp ...
10 October 2012	The Iconia W700 includes a cradle that not only acts as a tablet stand but has extra connectors http://ow.ly/ema38 pic.twitter.com/MdRcD7LO
11 October 2012	Sporting a gem-cut form, the Veriton N series are small enough to affix to the back of a monitor http://ow.ly/eo9jW pic.twitter.com/p0ufbpta

15 October 2012	Are you ready for Windows 8? http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1GNDs7DCTw ...
16 October 2012	The V3 Series keeps you ahead of digital trends with its timeless style & sharp computing in 14", 15.6" & 17.3" models pic.twitter.com/edll6BKA
17 October 2012	Laptop Magazine got their hands on our upcoming Acer Iconia W700 : "Think of it as an Ultrabook without the keyboard." http://blog.laptopmag.com/acer-iconia-w700-hands-on-11-inch-windows-8-tablet-starts-at-799 ...
18 October 2012	The powerful and fast Ultrabook S5 has a generously sized solid— Find out more here: http://aspire5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA/ pic.twitter.com/j2Sp7CPp
19 October 2012	Acer satisfies customer demands through innovative thinking, always seeking ways to put our creativity to optimal use pic.twitter.com/FbfzFaTK
19 October 2012	Acer holds the No 1 position for notebooks across Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) with a market share of 20% http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IT_224157.html ...
22 October 2012	What do you think of the Acer tagline? Hit RT if it speaks to you or reply to let us know what you think pic.twitter.com/3X1OdsIz
23 October 2012	The Orlando Pirates Learning Centre has been launched with the support of Acer Africa http://www.gadget.co.za/pebble.asp?relid=5280 ...
24 October 2012	Acer multi-gesture device touchpads allow you to swirl to navigate, rotate photos, pinch to zoom, and flick pic.twitter.com/YRQe1KmM
25 October 2012	One day till the launch of Windows 8 – RT if you're as excited as us!
26 October 2012	"Windows 8 PCs are the best PCs ever." http://www.news24.com/SciTech/News/Windows-8-officially-launched-in-New-York-20121025 ...
29 October 2012	Can you imagine a powerful Ultrabook like the S5 only being 11mm thin & 1.2kg light? You better http://aspire5.acer.com/html5/en-ZA/ pic.twitter.com/k1UWpMtE
30 October 2012	Come see the new, redesigned http://www.acer.co.za , showcasing the latest lineup of Windows 8 products pic.twitter.com/5fb8zq4a
30 October 2012	Complete the following: My personal highlight of October was _____. pic.twitter.com/Yk4oQZoh
31 October 2012	Complete the following: My personal highlight of October was _____. pic.twitter.com/Yk4oQZoh

1 November 2012	The Iconia A puts everything you need into the very palm of your hand http://www.acer.co.za/ac/en/ZA/content/series/iconia-tab-a ... pic.twitter.com/lrVRsHkT
2 November 2012	What do you think of the brand new Aspire S7? http://www.acer.com/aspires7/en_ZA/ pic.twitter.com/Utz5qfgW
5 November 2012	We'll be introducing a number of new Windows 8 touch products, like our ICONIA W5 Tablets pic.twitter.com/tTMetqbd