

**Dr Christelle Swart**

Department of  
Communication Science,  
College of Human  
Sciences, University of  
South Africa, Pretoria,  
South Africa

Email : cswart@unisa.  
ac.za

ORCID: [https://orcid.  
org/0000-0001-7119-  
519X](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7119-519X)

DOI: [https://dx.doi.  
org/10.18820/24150525/  
Comm.v26.1](https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150525/Comm.v26.1)

ISSN 2415-0525 (Online)  
Communitas 2021 26: 1-19

Date submitted:  
30 January 2021

Date accepted:  
04 May 2021

Date published:  
31 December 2021

© Creative Commons With  
Attribution (CC-BY)

OPEN ACCESS



# A FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION IN NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

## ABSTRACT

*As competition creates infinite choices, companies look for ways to connect emotionally with customers, become irreplaceable, and create enduring relationships. The continuous search for ways to establish emotional connections and create strong corporate brands could be achieved by the ability to integrate various online and offline communication tools. Given the wide range of communication tools available to connect with stakeholders, organisations must consider ways to combine these in the best possible ways since traditional media will not become obsolete. This article is based on the findings of a quantitative study that identified three broad foundational elements and unique features of a framework to achieve the integration of social media brand communication. The elements and features were empirically tested and verified. Results supported the correlation and a strong positive linear association between the elements confirmed the internal reliability between the sets of features, and indicated strong statistical justification of the combination of the features in the respective elements. By adopting an interdisciplinary focus on the corporate brand, social media, and Integrated Communication (IC), the article proposes a framework whereby the integration of social media brand communication could be attained; thus, promoting a strong corporate brand. The framework incorporates distinct strategic and tactical points at which the coordination of social media brand communication may occur.*

**Keywords:** non-profit organisations; social media; social media brand communication; corporate brand; integrated communication

## INTRODUCTION

As competition creates infinite choices, companies look for ways to connect emotionally with customers, become irreplaceable, and create enduring relationships. A strong

brand portrays the “face” of the organisation that makes it stand out in a densely crowded marketplace; thereby allowing people to become attached to it, to trust it, and to believe in its superiority (Langmade 2020). A strong corporate brand is particularly beneficial for valuable and lasting relationships (Vernuccio 2014: 211).

Organisations in the non-profit sector depend largely on strong brands that permit them to be distinctive and create positive impressions thereof (Daw *et al.* 2011: 3-4, 20). Moreover, organisations in this sector are required to operate in the same business environment as for-profits and vie with similar organisations to attain their organisational objectives and promote their causes. Daw *et al.* (2011: 20) view a brand as the organisation’s most valuable asset, comprising a “collection of perceptions about an organisation, formed by every communication, action, and interaction”. There is a continuous search for ways to establish emotional connections and create lasting relationships with stakeholders; in this regard, a key principle is deemed to be the ability to utilise a variety of communication tools, both online and offline, in an integrated way (Daw *et al.* 2011: 30). The prominence of stakeholders and their perceptions of and relations with the non-profit organisation necessitate a more substantial involvement of the organisation as opposed to earlier views that merely called for the coordination of some communication elements (Duncan 2005). The value of stakeholders in achieving social media integration and sustaining social media brand communication features distinctly in the framework presented in this article.

The above assertions reveal that communication is seemingly intrinsically related to the success of non-profit brands and incorporates the ways in which a brand connects and interacts holistically with stakeholders, including the message content used to convey desired brand messages (cf. Abratt & Kleyn 2012: 1055). Holtzhausen (2008) and Niemann (2005) confirm the worth of an integrated communication (IC) approach to gain an advantage over competitors, which accentuates the benefit of using communication with stakeholders in an organised way.

When brands and stakeholders connect and share on social media, it is described as engagement or interaction that, in line with the objectives of corporate branding, aims to create emotional bonds crucial to the development of relationships. The ways in which organisations connect with stakeholders are perceived to include tangible presentations or touchpoints and intangible elements that organisations purposely put forward (cf. Langmade 2020). Collectively, these can be referred to as communication touchpoints and they incorporate numerous organisation-wide endeavours, ranging from expressing the organisation’s standpoint pertaining to the environment and broader societal issues, its conduct towards its workforce, the total behaviour of all employees, and all communication efforts. It is also termed a brand persona (*ibid.*).

Given the wide range of communication tools available to connect with stakeholders, it is vital that organisations consider how to combine these in the best possible ways, as traditional media will not become obsolete.

Against this background, this article mainly aims to report on research into concepts for a conceptual framework for the integration of non-profit organisations’ social media brand communication. The research adopted an interdisciplinary focus on social

media, the corporate brand and IC, primarily because social media can be applied in different contexts. The lack of an individual theory of social media compelled the researcher to consider classical perspectives on human action, as well as contemporary perspectives on human action and interaction, symbolic interaction and social presence. This served as the theoretical framework for the study.

## KEY CONCEPTS

### Social media (SM)

Following a search of the diverse definitions and descriptions of the social media concept in the literature, and for the purposes of the current study, social media is defined as an interactive online platform that enables organisations and stakeholders to readily connect and interact in various ways.

### An integrated approach to social media brand communication

Insight into the coordination of an organisation's communication revealed various concepts, of which IC and communication integration (CI) are prominent. In searching for a definition of an integrated approach to social media brand communication, and considering the interdisciplinary focus of the study, it is proposed that it be defined as a philosophy of integration to achieve synergy and consistency of the communication endeavours of non-profit organisations on social media platforms (cf. Cornelissen 2013; Johansen & Andersen 2012).

### Corporate brand

The premise of this article is that a favourable corporate brand permits the organisation to build a trustworthy corporate brand and a good reputation that allow non-profit organisations to reach their strategic business objectives. A favourable corporate brand is perceived as the "visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organisation's unique business model" (Knox & Bickerton 2003: 1013) and represents the organisation as a whole, including all its products or services.

According to views expressed in the literature, corporate brand is defined as the point of interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders, with communication fundamental to create positive associations and impressions (cf. Urde 2013: 744).

### Corporate brand communication and social media brand communication

Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008: 65) assert that touch points refer to the numerous ways in which an organisation communicates or connects with its stakeholders, as these concurrently provide ways to expose stakeholders to the brand message. These touch points include the corporate identity, image and reputation. The researcher defines corporate brand communication as the numerous ways or touchpoints whereby non-profit organisations connect emotionally with stakeholders.

Based on the above conceptualisation, social media brand communication is then understood as the communication endeavours of the organisation by means of social media. For purposes of this article, the two-fold focus on social media and the corporate brand in the non-profit context points to the varied ways in which organisations apply social media to communicate and engage in conversation or discussion about the corporate brand. Social media essentially allows organisations and stakeholders to connect and interact through creating and sharing content to fulfil a basic human need for social interaction.

## Social media conversations

The concepts of interaction and conversation are not clearly distinguished in the literature. For purposes of this article, social media conversation is understood to be a type of social interaction specifically aimed at engaging in dialogue on social media and it suggests the exchange of messages over time, as opposed as to a single post on Facebook, for example. Hence, social media conversation refers to dialogue or dialogic engagement on social media platforms with and between the organisation and its stakeholders.

## Online electronic word of mouth

Conversations on social media platforms about and with the corporate brand allow stakeholders to express their opinions about an organisation without restrictions. In an online setting, mentions and discussions about the organisation between stakeholders are known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (cf. Moriarty *et al.* 2015: 83). For this article, eWOM is defined as all statements and mentions about the organisation that are expressed between various stakeholders on social media.

## Stakeholders

Based on the traditional definition of a stakeholder by Freeman (1984: 6), namely “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s purpose and objectives”, the concept is understood to refer to prominent groups who have an effect on and are affected by the activities of non-profit organisations in South Africa.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative strategy to empirically investigate possible elements and features of a framework that could guide organisations to integrate their social media brand communication. The potential elements and features emerged from a literature review combined with the investigation of historical IC models, IC models in a South African setting, and digital IC models.

## Population, sampling frame and sampling

The population of the study was the total number of non-profit organisations in South Africa. The sampling frame comprised registered non-profit organisations in the Prodder NGO online directory. A two-pronged approach was used for the online survey, namely

by using random sampling to select the accessible population, followed by purposive sampling based on selection criteria set by the researcher. The selection criteria to select the sample included that the non-profit organisation should (1) be a registered non-profit organisation; (2) be registered on the Prodder online directory; (3) be active on at least one social media platform; (4) have a dedicated person responsible for managing social media; and (4) be accessible to confirm the selection criteria (1), (2), and (3) above, and to receive a personal invitation to participate.

## Data collection

The online survey software programme SurveyMonkey was used to design and execute the questionnaire. The online questionnaire was self-administered and respondents could access it via a link in an email invitation. The response format selected for the present study was a ranking scale, namely the Likert scale.

## Data analysis

The proposed elements and distinct features of the framework were empirically verified through statistical research. The Pearson correlation coefficient test was used to establish whether a possible association existed between the three broad elements (specified in Table 1). The aim was to obtain insight into whether the suggested combinations of the elements could be suitable for integrating social media brand communication.

**TABLE 1: CORRELATION BETWEEN ELEMENTS FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION**

<b>Correlations between elements</b>			
<b>Elements/Sections</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std dev</b>
Fundamentals for integrating social media brand communication	42	1.96071	0.54140
Brand contact points	42	2.19892	0.65143
Ways to sustain social media brand communication integration	42	2.34560	0.64424

As illustrated in Table 1, the average scores between the three broad elements (between 1 and 3, but closer to 2) clearly reveal strong associations. Hence it can be concluded that the three elements were highly correlated.

As further validation, the Pearson correlation coefficient of  $p = <.0001$  (Table 2) supported the correlation and revealed a strong positive linear association between the elements.

**TABLE 2: PEARSON'S COEFFICIENT FOR INTERNAL RELIABILITY OF ELEMENTS FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION**

<b>Correlation for internal reliability of the elements</b>			
	<b>Element 1</b>	<b>Element 2</b>	<b>Element 3</b>
Fundamentals for integrating social media brand communication	1.00000 <.0001	0.66472 <.0001	0.60205 <.0001
Brand contact points	0.66472 <.0001	1.00000 elements	0.79633 <.0001
Ways to sustain social media brand communication integration	0.60205 <.0001	0.79633 <.0001	1.00000

The Cronbach coefficient alpha was used to measure and confirm the internal reliability of the sets of attributes/features in each of the three elements (Table 3).

**TABLE 3: INTERNAL RELIABILITY OF SETS OF FEATURES IN EACH ELEMENT**

<b>The fundamentals to integrate social media brand communication</b>		<b>Brand contact points</b>		<b>Ways to sustain social media brand communication integration</b>	
Variable	Alpha	Variable	Raw	Variable	Raw
Raw	-	Raw	0.877911	Raw	0.893907
Standardised	0.735044	Standardised	0.879016	Standardised	0.895959

The results indicated acceptable and excellent reliability between all the features, which revealed strong statistical justification for the combinations thereof in the respective elements.

## FOUNDATION OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND COMMUNICATION

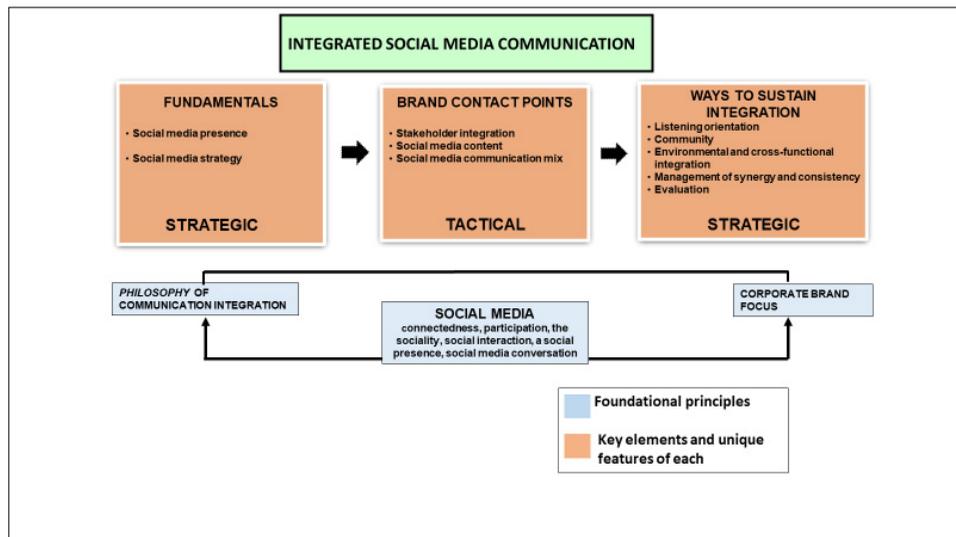
Three overarching principles derived from the interdisciplinary view and through statistical research form the foundation of this framework and focus collectively on the use of social media in an integrated way. These are a philosophy of communication integration and the objective to achieve a favourable corporate brand, both of which are

underpinned by a social media focus and its key elements. The key elements inherent in social media and in this article context include connectedness (Fuchs 2014: 37), participation (Fuchs 2014: 52), the sociality of this media (Finkbeiner 2013: 6), social interaction (Hocevar 2013: 1), a social presence (Gooch & Watts 2013); interactivity (Fourie 2017: 19), and social media conversation (Romenti *et al.* 2014: 10).

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

Three broad concepts are proposed for integrating social media brand communication in non-profit organisations, namely fundamentals for integrating social media brand communication, brand contact points, and ways to sustain social media brand communication integration. Insights gained from the literature review, complemented by the findings and interpretations from the empirical research, revealed specific features that are proposed to constitute each of the elements above. Figure 1 illustrates the foundational principles, key elements, and unique features of each.

**FIGURE 1:** FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES, KEY ELEMENTS AND UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRATED SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION



This framework focuses exclusively on strategic (elements 1 and 3) and mechanistic or tactical (element 2) levels at which the coordination of social media brand communication may occur. Considering that the strategic intent of non-profits needs to be distinct, this focus allows for a balanced view thereof, together with the ways in which the organisation can communicate with stakeholders in an integrated way.

## Element 1: Fundamentals for integrating social media brand communication

This element attends to social media presence and social media strategy as essentials for a foundation to integrate social media communication.

### *Social media presence*

A social media presence is assumed to be a prerequisite for organisations to be active and to communicate on social media platforms. Significant is the notion that social media contributes to a sense of being in the presence of others (Gooch & Watts 2013: 507), which allows stakeholders to perceive the organisation as present and the communication with and from it as real. In this way the organisation is permitted to exhibit its brand persona and create a certain image. A social presence thus facilitates online conversations that create the perception that the organisation is human (Langmade 2020). Gallagher and Ransbotham (2010: 199, 200) assert that a distinct presence influences engagement and is essential to attract dialogue with stakeholders. Moreover, not only do stakeholders expect organisations to establish and sustain a social presence (*ibid.*) but, in turn, it can earn social media recognition for the organisation (Rampton 2014). An organisation's presence is supposedly achieved through different social media efforts, such as participating in conversations, sharing content, and engaging in discussions about the corporate (cf. Digital Marketing Institute 2018). The Digital Marketing Institute (2018) suggests the importance of a strategy to improve presence on social media. A social media presence is furthermore recognised as a way of portraying the brand persona, which could generate support for the non-profit organisation's cause. Since the aim of achieving a positive corporate brand, among others, is to form emotional connections with stakeholders, social presence in an online setting could be linked to creating an "emotional sense of belonging" (Wei *et al.* 2012: 530).

### *Social media strategy*

Effing and Spil (2016: 2) define social media strategy as "a goal-directed planning process for creating user generated content, driven by a group of Internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position". As Mulder (2015: 15) asserts, such a process should consist of principles that deliberately guide the consistent integration of communication endeavours. In this context, a social media strategy permits the all-inclusive planning of social media activities in an integrated way, with an improved social media presence as the most significant benefit (Digital Marketing Institute 2018).

The literature reveals various perspectives on the items that such a strategy ought to contain, as well as a lack of clarity on whether it should be a separate guiding document or part of a broader communication strategy. Nonetheless, the significance of such a guiding document to provide strategic direction to organisations towards the integration of the organisation's social media communication is evident (Mulder 2015: 18). Specific elements are proposed to constitute a social media strategy, namely (1) core organisational objectives for social media brand communication,

including a decision on the type of social media engagement required; (2) knowledge of stakeholders and their preferences, needs, and preferred platforms; (3) operational capacity, including available and skilled staff; (4) a social media content plan by identifying brand messages and messages strategies and deciding on the ratio of owned, co-created and curated content; (5) an eWOM plan to encourage and measure favourable eWOM where attention should be focused on the social media communication mix, the most suitable platforms to use, and their integration; and (6) establish the effectiveness of the strategy through social media analytics software, social media monitoring, and a social media audit.

There are many advantages associated with having a social media strategy. The changes and opportunities when communicating via social media should compel organisations to appreciate the importance of a social media strategy that, in the long run, can cultivate enduring relationships and thereby grow their business (Digital Marketing Institute 2018). Equally important in the context of this article, a social media strategy is said to be beneficial in optimising a social media presence, which is the first attribute/feature of this element (Digital Marketing Institute 2018).

## Element 2: Brand contact points of social media integration

A brand contact point refers to any place of connection between the brand and stakeholders, which allows interaction with the organisation and that could alter the way in which the brand is perceived (cf. Patterson 2018). It is proposed that this element be broadly pitched at a tactical level, focusing on contact points or ways through which the integration of communication on social media can be achieved. The three main opportunities for progressing towards social media integration are stakeholder integration; social media content; and the social media brand communication mix. It is noteworthy that communication – or brand contact points – should not necessarily be identical, but should consistently support the broad philosophy of the organisation (Torp 2009: 1999).

### *Stakeholder integration*

A stakeholder perspective is key to achieving communication integration as it requires consideration of all the groups and individuals with which the organisation communicates. It focuses on understanding the needs, expectations and preferences of those prosumers of social media content with whom the organisation wishes to connect, create loyalty, and build long-term relationships (cf. Steyn & De Beer 2012). This increasing focus on stakeholders is also referred to as “stakeholder perspective” (Cornelissen 2011: 40), which corroborates the importance of considering the needs and interests of stakeholders when communicating with them in an integrated way (cf. Finne & Grönroos 2009: 180).

The view here is that stakeholder integration denotes that organisations will embrace conversations with and between stakeholders on social media platforms. This article proposes that stakeholder integration can be achieved by being attentive to the conversations and reflecting on and responding to discussions on social media about the corporate brand. This implies attention to two-way communication, implementing

a listening approach, and enduring dialogue. Additionally, it incorporates brand-point integration that exposes stakeholders to brand messages from the organisation. An eWOM plan, as part of a social media strategy, could be valuable to monitor mentions and conversations on social media.

#### *Social media content*

Despite the many references to the concept of social media content in the literature, no single definition exists that notably distinguishes between different types of content. What is widely agreed on, however, is that content is at the core of social media and permits social media users to connect, interact, create, share, discuss and converse widely (cf. Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 61). As social media content encourages unrestricted conversations, it allows stakeholders to create and share experiences about the corporate brand. Social media thus acts as the vehicle to reinforce corporate brand messages through such unhindered engagement (cf. Ashley & Tuten 2015: 15).

In this sense, content can be understood as being both the driver and the product of social interaction on social media platforms in different ways, including images, blogs, posts and reposts, tagging, videos, tweets and retweets, and the like (Sachan & Emmanuel 2011: 145). The researcher classifies social media content as created, co-created and curated (Rakić & Rakić 2014: 197). Definite possibilities for stakeholders exist; particularly in creating content and assisting in the co-creation of content on social media platforms the possibilities are limitless and allow for their integration. Integration can thus be achieved through the management and coordination of social media content and, particularly, the timing thereof, the monitoring of content on these platforms, a combination of the different forms of content (posts, tweets, images and the like), and the ratio in which the three types are applied.

#### *Social media brand communication mix*

In line with the aim of this framework, social media is viewed as suitable to serve as an integrated platform by means of which a collection of online and digital media is used in unison/jointly. This term is used when referring to the comprehensive collection of communication methods, tools, mechanics or tactics that the organisation uses to communicate and that needs to be integrated. Decisions around the blend of different types of media should be stipulated in a social media strategy, in much the same way as the decisions about the different social media content that an organisation uses. In respect of the communication mix, it is vital to adopt a holistic view of all communication by the organisation, namely to consider all possible types of traditional and social media platforms and the different communication methods used, including email, promotions, personal selling, eWOM and other communication actions (Rakić & Rakić 2014).

Decisions about the communication mix require the organisation to ensure alignment of content with its cause and the overall organisational objectives; thereby, deciding on the best way to communicate and align content and the most relevant and effective methods.

The significance of an integrated approach to the communication mix provides the basis for the current focus on aligning and integrating the communication endeavours of various functions of the organisation to align the corporate brand with the desired reputation and image. It must be acknowledged that communication is an intra-organisational (internally and across different departments) and an outward-directed (with stakeholders) activity that suggests that all management functions should be concerned with and involved in the conceptualisation of communication initiatives that directly impact the image of stakeholders (Christensen *et al.* 2008). Such communication focuses on crossing traditional organisational boundaries and the inclusion of all “traditional” management functions in its quest to achieve a coherent image of the organisation.

The framework distinctively attends to the following two aspects, namely (1) the use of social and traditional media collectively; and (2) the use of multiple platforms that allow for the combining of video, voice, image and data (referred to as media convergence).

### *Combining traditional and social media*

The combination of different types of media to achieve communication consistency requires thorough deliberation. Careful consideration is needed if the organisation wishes to align its communication actions and ultimately achieve communication consistency.

The combination of all communication tools and methods into a single toolbox is evident in historical and contemporary IC models (Gronstedt 1996; Niemann 2005; Rakić & Rakić 2014). This refers to the comprehensive collection of communication methods, tools, mechanics or tactics, which organisations need to apply in an integrated manner. The use of multiple social media platforms extends this idea in an online setting, mainly as a result of technological advances, and it implies the inclusion of all traditional and social media available to the organisation.

Considering the views on this issue, it is essential to differentiate between traditional and newer types of media and to incorporate both in an overall strategy. Examples of traditional media are media releases, brochures and newsletters, and social media platforms that specifically enable conversation, such as Twitter and Facebook. A non-profit organisation’s unique cause, specific objectives and the methods readily available should serve as points of departure to ensure that the set of communication tools and methods are suitable and functional. Furthermore, organisations should weigh up the value of using traditional media to increase awareness of the platforms that they actively use, and consider the value of links on social media to content in traditional media.

### *Media convergence*

Media convergence is loosely described as the use of various platforms that allows for the combination of video, voice, image and data, and it essentially enables communication, or the “flow of content”, to take place on many platforms (Jenkins 2006).

The distinctions between different types of content, as well as the types of social media platforms, necessitate a two-fold approach. First, content should be repurposed and converted to suit different types of platforms. Insights into which content succeeds on each platform is vital to ensure it is appropriate and shareable, for example, videos on YouTube, or pictures, photographs and other images on Instagram. Second, content convergence (as referred to in this article) is needed and signifies the use of content in different forms to promote the corporate brand. When the types of content are diversified and used in different ways to advance the same brand message, it not only creates interest and awareness of the corporate brand, but also drives conversation and triggers emotions. Examples include pictures, videos, comments, statistics and articles on social media, which are then modified in an article or media release in traditional media.

Employing multiple social media platforms allows the sharing of uniform corporate brand messages with stakeholders on the platforms they regularly access. Moreover, as stakeholders connect across geographical boundaries, it extends the reach of corporate brand messages when stakeholders share these with a wider audience.

### Element 3: Ways to sustain social media brand communication integration

This element is pitched at the strategic level and specifically considers the continuation of the communication integration initiative. Therefore, organisations should consider specific aspects to maintain such an endeavour. This element focuses on a social listening orientation that encompasses listening to discussions and responding on social media; the importance of community, where stakeholders meet and connect around noteworthy topics; the need for the integration of environmental aspects into social media issues and the inclusion of all management functions (cross-functional); the tasking of a multi-skilled individual or a team of communicators to manage the synergy and consistency of communication activities; and the evaluation or measurement of the social media communication integration.

#### *A social listening orientation*

Tran (2020) defines “social listening” as the tracking of social media platforms for mentions and conversations related to the corporate brand. In this way organisations may uncover opportunities on which they can act. This view points to a two-fold process that allows organisations to detect conversations by stakeholders and thus to reveal prevailing attitudes and emerging topics that need to be addressed, followed by decisions on the appropriate action to be taken. Listening to stakeholder conversations on social media platforms is key to achieving IC and successfully integrating stakeholders and their conversations by paying attention to their discussions. Social listening also seems beneficial to track competitors and indicates where the brand is positioned in the marketplace (Tran 2020).

Moreover, social listening is valuable to obtain an understanding of the online mood, which indicates how stakeholders feel about the corporate brand (Tran 2020). This is also referred to as social sentiment, with the monitoring thereof being fundamental to social listening (Tran 2020). The opinion is that listening demands comprehensive

knowledge of a particular organisation. Listening commences with an understanding of the organisation itself, its most important programmes and issues, and key concepts relating to these programmes that will ultimately point to the popular topics on the social media platforms. This underscores the strategic importance of this element.

Literature supports the idea that exchanges between stakeholders on social media take place unhindered and in multiple directions (Romenti *et al.* 2014:10). Thus, the online mood will be reflected/evident in conversations with the organisation and with others about the organisation that are therefore explicitly extended through the heightened interaction on social media platforms. The implication for non-profit organisations could be either to strengthen or weaken the corporate brand (Vernuccio 2014: 215); hence, the need for deliberate efforts to stay informed of these discussions.

### *Community*

The significance of community as a foundational element of social media is underscored in the framework. This is founded on insights in social media literature in related disciplines, which reveal that social media is primarily community-driven and centres on the need for human interaction. Leiner *et al.* (2009: 29) explain that the “Internet is as much a collection of communities as a collection of technologies, and its success is largely attributed to both satisfying basic community needs as well as utilizing the community in an effective way to push the infrastructure forward”. The ability of social media to congregate people around common interests and topics contributes to the forming of online communities. In the same vein, it allows for the identification and mobilisation of influential people, such as brand ambassadors, influencers and advocates, who can extend awareness of the non-profit corporate brand by connecting its supporters across geographical boundaries (Boster *et al.* 2011: 180).

The framework proposes certain considerations to promote the formation of brand communities:

1. *Utilise social online platforms* to create awareness of the non-profit brand and to introduce and connect the non-profit organisation with existing and potential stakeholders. The all-inclusive planning contained within a social media strategy will guide the decision on which social media platforms are best suited to promote the organisation’s cause. This includes aspects such as available resources, the organisation’s stakeholders, and the social media platforms most preferred by the organisation. The value of using certain social media platforms is that they intensify interaction with and between stakeholders to eventually form and maintain online communities and promote stakeholder relations.
2. *Purposely engage in conversations with influential groups* about the corporate brand. These will be people who have a sense of connection with the brand and its cause, for example brand ambassadors or advocates, who could thus be identified and connected. Against the background provided thus far it is fair to conclude that interaction on social media offers numerous opportunities

that could be optimised to unite stakeholders who share a passion for the brand and who will drive conversations about it (Berger 2020).

3. *Prefix hashtags to campaigns, events, topics or conversations* that allow stakeholders to discover and assemble around these activities in distinct communities (Sachan & Emmanuel 2011: 145). As the creation, adaptation and sharing of different types of content is central to social media, it is important to post content that stakeholders view as worthy to be engaged in (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 61).
4. Build community by *creating social media content* that resonates with stakeholders. Tailored content can create meaningful connections with stakeholders, as well as permit the formation of communities of like-minded people (Anon 2019). The involvement of both organisation and stakeholder to co-create content for social media could leverage the use thereof. This point demands an in-depth knowledge of the organisation's stakeholders and their needs, preferences and pertinent community issues to create brand awareness (Anon 2019).
5. *Accept the importance of brand ambassadors, influencers and advocates* to create communities by creating and extending brand awareness. The existence and impact of influential and well-known people with the aptitude to connect widely dispersed audiences around certain topics and interests would be invaluable to the non-profit sector. Organisations should be committed to identify, acknowledge and exploit the connectivity of these individuals to unite stakeholders into communities.
6. *Create personal bonds with and empower brand ambassadors* (Berger 2020). It is vital to build relationships with those who are passionate about your brand and allow the organisation to connect with communities authentically (Anon 2020). Therefore, organisations should provide ambassadors with the necessary resources to allow them to communicate and extend the reach of the corporate brand. They should be clearly informed of requirements and guidelines through the availability of a support channel when needed (Anon 2020). Organisations could support their personal projects and possibly create an ambassador community to link them with other ambassadors.
7. *Knowledge of interests and common bonds*. An early definition by Ridings *et al.* (2002: 273) identifies the key elements of community as being the "common interests and practices" that are regularly communicated. This highlights the importance of identifying and getting to know the causes, interests and passions that could create an association with the corporate brand and a sense of belonging.

#### *Environmental and cross-functional integration*

Although these two elements are not consistently emphasised in the literature on integrated communication, the framework proposes that they should form the basis of a strategy for social media brand communication. Niemann (2005: 260) asserts that environmental integration recognises the impact of "political, social, economic and

related environments” and specifically refers to integration into these settings. From an IC outlook an intense awareness of the external environment is needed, which points to the necessity of being aware of these dynamics and applying the insights to communication strategies and tactics. Though seemingly understated, the online environment – as a communication setting – demands organisations to keep up with rapidly evolving social media trends.

Christensen *et al.* (2008) define integrated communication as the “efforts to coordinate and align all communications so that the organization speaks consistently across different audiences and media”. The idea is that integration should specifically be concerned with the comprehensive integration of all traditional areas of communication of the organisation (Johansen & Andersen 2012: 276). When combined, the strategic input of traditional functions, such as corporate communications and marketing, drives value to the organisation in terms of a positive corporate brand, as well as to stakeholders, by meeting their expectations (The Conference Board 2016). Cornelissen (2013) refers to this as “the orchestration and coordination of all communication and content” that, in the context of this article, will allow organisations in the non-profit sector to achieve uniform impressions of their corporate brand. The research revealed that communication professionals in these organisations are often expected to fulfil more than one role and, in turn, are authorised to pursue synergy and consistency of communication about the corporate brand.

#### *Management of synergy and consistency of communication endeavours*

Contemporary South African models on integrating communication justify the appointment of a multiskilled communicator or a specific team to attend to the communication of the entire organisation; thereby, achieving alignment and cohesion of communication (Niemann 2005). However, recent integrated models on digital communication that are relevant in this context, such as those by Gurău (2008), Castronovo and Huang (2012) and Rakić & Rakić (2014), fail to consider this aspect. This is contrary to the basic premise adopted in this article, namely that a favourable corporate brand is beneficial in creating a good reputation for non-profit organisations.

It stands to reason that such a coordinator or team should be appropriately positioned to ensure progress in the strategic consistency of communication. This function necessitates a sound knowledge of the organisation’s strategic purpose and overall intention, which comprises the goals and values of the organisation, the structure of the organisation to achieve cross-functional communication consistency, as well as sound knowledge of social media platforms and the different content that can be used thereon.

#### *Evaluation*

The proposed framework intends to assist non-profit organisations to attain a desired corporate brand by way of consistent communication. For this reason, organisations should regularly gain an overview of the progress made towards the integration of social media – hence, progress towards the IC effort of the organisation. It stands to reason that the success of the integration of social media brand communication needs to be measured in terms of the strategic objectives pursued.

## CONCLUSION

By adopting an interdisciplinary focus on the corporate brand, social media and IC, the article proposes possible elements for a framework whereby the integration of social media brand communication could be attained; thus, promoting a strong corporate brand. The article provided valuable insights into a possible framework to integrate social media brand communication in non-profit organisations – one that could contribute greatly to the practice of communication in these organisations. Distinct strategic and tactical points were identified for incorporation in the framework. The combination of the theoretical aspects of the proposed elements was statistically confirmed with a high correlation between the elements. The findings of the study suggest that while non-profit organisations in South Africa acknowledge the importance of social media, they are not yet utilising the possibilities strategically.

The main limitations of the study were the lack of relevant social media theory, particularly with an IC focus and in a non-profit context; the fact that the response rate did not allow for an investigation into the relationships between the variables; and an incomplete and incorrect database. Meaningful statistical analysis provided adequate statistical support for the inclusion and combination of the three elements in the framework, but the conduct of factor analysis to determine the relationships between them could not be achieved. Lastly, inaccurate information was found in the database and for-profit organisations were included in some instances.

## REFERENCES

- Abratt, R. & Kleyn, N. 2012. Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate reputations. *European Journal of Marketing* 46(7/8): 1048-1063.
- Anon. 2019. 13 ways to create content for social media that connects with your brand's audience. [Online]. Available at: <https://grin.co/blog/create-content-for-social-media/> [Accessed on 14 September 2020].
- Anon. 2020. The guide to brand ambassador marketing. [Online]. Available at: [https://blog.inzpire.me/ambassador-marketing/#Step\\_6\\_Motivate\\_empower\\_your\\_brand\\_ambassadors](https://blog.inzpire.me/ambassador-marketing/#Step_6_Motivate_empower_your_brand_ambassadors) [Accessed on 14 January 2021].
- Ashley, C. & Tuten, T. 2015. Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. *Psychology and Marketing* 32(1): 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20761>
- Berger, T. 2020. What are brand ambassadors and where to find them. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.socialseeder.com/en/blog/brand-ambassadorship/brand-ambassadors-find> [Accessed on 14 September 2020].
- Boster, F.J., Kotowski, M.R., Andrews, K.R. & Serota, K. 2011. Identifying influence: development, validation of connectivity, persuasiveness, and maven scales. *Journal of Communication* 61(1): 178-196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01531.x>
- Castronovo, C. & Huang, L. 2012. Social media in an alternative marketing communication model. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness* 6(1): 117-134.

- Christensen, L.T., Firat, A.F. & Torp, S. 2008. The organization of integrated communications: toward flexible integration. *European Journal of Marketing* 42(3/4): 423-452. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560810853002>
- Cornelissen, J.P. 2011. *Corporate communication: a guide to theory and practice*. (Third edition). London, UK and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cornelissen, J.P. 2013. Corporate communication. In: Donsbach, W. (ed.). *International encyclopedia of communication*. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.ngotranthinh.com/i/Blog/Entries/2012/10/30\\_vdvv\\_files/S13.Professor%20Joep%20Cornelissen%20Corporate%20Communications%20Theory%20and%20Practice%20%20%20%202004.pdf](http://www.ngotranthinh.com/i/Blog/Entries/2012/10/30_vdvv_files/S13.Professor%20Joep%20Cornelissen%20Corporate%20Communications%20Theory%20and%20Practice%20%20%20%202004.pdf) [Accessed on 19 February 2021].
- Daw, J.S., Cone, C., Erhard, A. & Merenda, K.D. 2011. *Breakthrough nonprofit branding: seven principles to power extraordinary results*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Digital Marketing Institute. 2018. *Evolution of social media: Nonprofit organizations' use of Twitter and Instagram: A conceptual framework*. [Online]. Available at: <https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/10-ways-small-businesses-can-improve-their-social-media-presence>. [Accessed on 11 January 2021].
- Duncan, T. 2005. *Principles of advertising & IMC*. (Second edition). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Effing, R. & Spil, T.A.M. 2016. The social strategy cone: Towards a framework for evaluating social media strategies. *International Journal of Information Management* 36(1): 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2015.07.009>
- Finkbeiner, P. 2013. Social media and social capital: A literature review in the field of knowledge management. *International Journal of Management Cases* 15(4): 6-19.
- Finne, A. & Grönroos, C. 2009. Rethinking marketing communication: From integrated marketing communication to relationship communication. *Journal of Marketing Communication* 15(2-3): 179-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527260902757654>
- Fourie, P. 2017. Social media and mediated communication in postmodern society. In: Fourie, P. (ed.). *Media studies, social (new) media and mediated communication theory*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Freeman, R.E. 1984. *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston, MA: Pitman.
- Fuchs, C. 2014. *Social media: A critical introduction*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446270066>
- Gallaughan, J. & Ransbotham, S. 2010. Social media and customer dialog management at Starbucks. *MIS Quarterly Executive* 9(4): 197-212.
- Gooch, D. & Watts, L. 2013. Social presence and the void in distant relationships: How do people use communication technologies to turn absence into fondness of the heart, rather than drifting out of mind? [Online]. Available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F00146-013-0492-9> [Accessed on 10 December 2020].
- Gronstedt, A. 1996. Integrated marketing communication and public relations: A stakeholder model. In: Thorson, E. & Moore, J. (eds). *Integrated communication: Synergy of persuasive voices*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Guräu, C. 2008. Integrated online marketing communication: implementation and management. *Journal of Communication Management* 12(2): 169-184. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540810881974>
- Hocevar, K.P. 2013. What is social about social media users? How social media efficacy impacts information evaluation online. [Online]. Available at: [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&res\\_dat=xri:pqdiss&rft\\_val\\_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:dissertation&rft\\_dat=xri:pqdiss:1548246](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:pqdiss&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:dissertation&rft_dat=xri:pqdiss:1548246) [Accessed on 2 July 2020].
- Holtzhausen, D.R. 2008. Strategic communication. In: Donsbach, W. (ed). *International encyclopedia of communication*. [Online]. Available at: [http://0-www.communicationencyclopedia.com.oasis.unisa.ac.za/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9781405131995\\_chunk\\_g978140513199524\\_ss111-1](http://0-www.communicationencyclopedia.com.oasis.unisa.ac.za/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9781405131995_chunk_g978140513199524_ss111-1) [Accessed on 19 November 2020].
- Jenkins, H. 2006. Welcome to convergence culture. [Online]. Available at: [http://henryjenkins.org/2006/06/welcome\\_to\\_convergence\\_culture.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2006/06/welcome_to_convergence_culture.html) [Accessed on 28 January 2021].
- Johansen, T.S. & Andersen, S.E. 2012. Co-creating ONE: rethinking integration within communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 17(3): 272-288. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281211253520>
- Kaplan, A.M. & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons* 53: 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>
- Knox, S. & Bickerton, D. 2003. The six conventions of corporate branding. *European Journal of Marketing* 37(7/8): 998-1016. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560310477636>
- Langmade, L. 2020. How to develop a brand persona and a brand identity. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.vergemarketing.agency/blog/brand-persona> [Accessed on 25 August 2020].
- Moriarty, S., Mitchell, N. & Wells, W. 2015. *Advertising and IMC: principles and practice*. (Tenth edition). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Mulder, D. 2015. Introduction to integrated communication. in: Mulder, D. & Niemann-Struweg, I. *Strategic integrated communication*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Niemann, I. 2005. Strategic integrated communication implementation: Towards a South African conceptual model. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Ouwersloot, H. & Duncan, T. 2008. *Integrated marketing communication*. London: McGraw-Hill.
- Patterson, L. 2018. Touchpoint effectiveness: six steps to better customer experiences. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2018/34787/how-to-measure-touchpoint-effectiveness-six-steps-to-better-customer-experiences> [Accessed on 15 January 2021].
- Rakić, B. & Rakić, M. 2014. Integrated marketing communications paradigm in digital environment: the five pillars of integration. *Megatrend Review* 11(1): 187-204. <https://doi.org/10.5937/MegRev1401187R>

- Rampton, J. 2014. 25 ways to grow your social media presence. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnrampton/2014/09/29/25-ways-to-grow-your-social-media-presence/?sh=33d6f562fbbd> [Accessed on 11 January 2021].
- Ridings, C.M., Gefen, D. & Arinze, B. 2002. Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 11(3-4): 271-295. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687\(02\)00021-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0963-8687(02)00021-5)
- Romenti, S., Murtarelli, G. & Valentini, C. 2014. Organisations' conversations in social media: Applying dialogue strategies in times of crises. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 19(1): 10-33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-05-2012-0041>
- Sachan, A. & Emmanuel, S. 2011. Efficient access control in multimedia social networks. In: Hoi, C.H., Luo, J., Boll, S., Xu, D., Jin, R. & King, I. (eds). *Social media modeling and computing*. Available at: <http://0-dx.doi.org.oasis.unisa.ac.za/10.1007/978-0-85729-436-4> [Accessed on 20 May 2020]. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-85729-436-4\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-85729-436-4_7)
- Steyn, B. & De Beer, E. 2012. Conceptualising strategic communication management (SCM) in the context of governance and stakeholder inclusiveness. *Communicare* 31(2): 29-55.
- The Conference Board. 2016. Are corporate communications and marketing delivering value at your company? [Online]. <https://conference-board.org/topics/integrated-corporate-communications-and-marketing>. [Accessed on 23 September 2020].
- Torp, S. 2009. Integrated communications: From one look to normative consistency. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 14(2): 190-206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280910953861>
- Tran, T. 2020. What is social listening, why it matters, and 10 tools to make it easier. [Online]. Available at: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-listening-business/#:~:text=Social%20listening%20is%20the%20process,cruical%20component%20of%20audience%20research> [Accessed on 07 September 2020].
- Urde, M. 2013. The corporate brand identity matrix. *Journal of Brand Management* 20(9): 742–761. <https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.12>
- Vernuccio, M. 2014. Communicating social brands through corporate branding: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Business Communication* 51(3): 211-233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525400>
- Wei, C., Chen, N. & Kinshuk. 2012. A model for social presence in online classrooms. *Educational Technology Research and Development* 60(3): 529-545. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-012-9234-9>