
THE USE OF TWITTER IN BRANDING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

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ABSTRACT

Twitter is shaping brand communication globally at a mere 140 characters a time. Although Twitter is seen as a social media platform with little impact, the number of followers that can be attained “tweet” another story. This article focuses on the way in which marketers can utilise this social media platform to promote their brand image by improving their brand’s online presence. By investigating the branding strategies and characteristics of an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy, and more specifically the 5R model proposed by Schultz (2000), a framework was created to analyse social media messages. This framework was employed within a qualitative research approach to analyse all the Twitter posts of the University of the Free State (UFS) between 1 January 2013 and 31 July 2013. This was done to determine how the UFS made use of its Twitter profile to enhance the perceptions about its brand. The results underlined the importance of IMC characteristics in social media messages for the messages to contribute to the overall brand image of the institution. Furthermore, the results indicated that in order for a brand to have a successful online presence, the marketers should embrace technology and align all messages with specific objectives. When each online brand message contains an IMC characteristic, a core value of the institution and a motivational objective, there are no boundaries for how far the “little blue bird” can take the brand.

Keywords: brand communication, social media, Twitter, University of the Free State, brand image, Integrated Marketing Communication, brand perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has taken the marketing world by storm. The father of the modern computer, John Von Neumann (1903-1957), once said, “It would appear that we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology, although one should be careful with such statements, as they tend to sound pretty silly in 5 years” (Schultz 2011). It is almost 40 years later and his statement is validated by the rapid change in technology. It is the era of social media where relationships are nurtured via this channel, rather than via actual conversation. If this is to be said about interpersonal communication, one cannot even begin to imagine the possibilities that social media create for brands to communicate with their target audience.

It is important for businesses to make use of social networks for it will enable any business (local or global) to increase market share and drive sales (Hartley 2010: 3). Social media is the “welcoming mat” of an organisation today. It does not only increase global visibility and awareness but also serves as the platform for an organisation to engage in two-way communication, thus building relationships with both current and potential customers. For businesses to avoid being seen as outdated five years from now, it is essential for them to make the brand available to their customers on any network or social media available. This task may seem simple but the social media platform of an organisation can also sow perceptions of distrust and negligence when the messages are not well-constructed. Despite the immense potential of social media for an organisation, this medium is not always used to its full potential. The aim of this article is to provide guidelines about the way in which an organisation could use social media to enhance their brand and to circumvent any messages that might lead to negative perceptions of the brand.

Tertiary institutions such as universities require proper communication channels as there are several constituent groups that are dependent on information on a regular basis. Therefore it is essential for these institutions to optimise social media channels in order to reach their target market. As this specific market includes people between the ages of 18 and 26, social media might be one of the best ways to communicate with this specific age group (IEASA 2013). This article focuses on the Twitter messages of a university in order to determine how the messages this institution posted on its social media platform promoted its overall brand.

In the following section, marketing strategies and elements are discussed that may contribute to the successful presence of any company on a social media platform such as Twitter. An integrated marketing communication strategy plays a fundamental role in the success of brand messages and therefore should be aligned with proper Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies and elements. This ensures that the messages posted on the social media site convey the same

brand messages as the other forms of advertising and communication. The insight gathered from the IMC and marketing strategies will be used to analyse the Twitter messages of the specific university to determine whether these messages contribute to the overall image of the brand.

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IMC

Marketers face the challenge of constantly having to keep up with the latest technological developments. When it comes to branding, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. A powerful message loses its impact when communicated through the wrong channels. It is, therefore, important to know one's audience before the budget is spent on the wrong communication medium. Hartley (2010: 14) suggests steps to safeguard the delivery of messages via social networks to prevent the channel of the message from being the "weak link" in the "chain" of the brand.

A previous study on the effects of the brand promotions of a university was done at the University of De Sevilla in 2013 by Guzmán, del Moral, Pérez, Lardón de Guevara and Gómez. The aim of their study was to investigate the top 200 universities of the Shanghai Ranking's usage and presence on Twitter. Their study focused mainly on how these universities managed to use their Twitter profiles in order to increase their audience scope. From their findings they concluded that interactive communication with several internal and external constituencies, as well as a clear profile of their corporate information, led to a successful Twitter presence.

The first step for a business to move towards a more technologically advanced marketing approach is to embrace technology, rather than to avoid it (Hartley 2010: 38). Before any decisions can be made regarding the type of social media channel that should be used, the marketing techniques of social media marketing should be reviewed. The challenge of compromising between the new media and the old traditions will be the success of making a statement about the brand by means of digital media. Hartley (2010: 50) identifies the ability of social media marketing to aid in several other business activities. He explains that social networks can be employed to recruit professionals needed in a company. Social networks can also reinforce the marketing and communication messages regarding a product or service to a broad audience scope, and serve as a platform for a company to engage in two-way communication with clients and prospective clients. Thus, social media should be used to convey the core values of the company, as with traditional marketing, but only in such a way that interactivity between the different constituencies are initiated.

After considering the different techniques of social media as a marketing platform, one should apply the insight to the integrated marketing strategy of the

organisation. This will enhance the contribution of the social media messages to the overall brand. Duncan (2002: 8) defines IMC as a process where customer relationships are managed that drives the brand value. He states that it is a cross-functional or two-way process of creating and maintaining relationships with different stakeholder groups by controlling and influencing the messages that are sent out to these groups. With the right IMC strategy, a purposeful dialogue can be created between the brand and the different stakeholder groups (Duncan 2002: 8).

Within an IMC approach, several elements should be taken into consideration when brand messages are formulated. First of all two-way communication is essential in building a brand as it contributes to trust and loyalty of the consumers regarding the brand (Klopper & North 2010). The unique selling proposition (USP) of the brand also contributes to customer loyalty. The Chartered Institute of Marketing (2009: 2) defines USP as a single, unique element or product offering that distinguishes the brand from all the competition; it should be visible in all brand activities and messages. When consistency is key, an overall brand image can be built. This will give consumers and potential consumers a better understanding of what the core values of the brand are and will lead to brand loyalty. When the company has established a good brand image, it will be easier to distinguish the company from its competitors in the market (Shimp & Andrews 2014: 35).

The use of social media networks for marketing holds numerous benefits. One of the core benefits of online marketing, as acknowledged by Merrill, Latham, Santalesa and Navetta (2011: 3), is that it is more cost-effective. Therefore, more messages can be sent out to keep the target audience informed about any valuable information regarding the brand. Online marketing also provides an organisation the opportunity to engage in two-way communication with its target audience. Relationships should be rooted in trust; they will be reinforced via two-way communication. Online marketing ensures a much wider audience scope than traditional marketing, thus international markets can be reached (*ibid.*).

THE MESSAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Meyerson (2010: 107) identifies several aspects that should be taken into consideration when creating a brand message for social media networks. In line with the IMC philosophy it is important that all brand messages are in line with the core values and identity of the brand. Communicating the right message also helps a brand establish and position itself in the market (Meyerson 2010: 107). Messages should be formulated carefully to ensure that the specific objectives of these messages are attainable. Furthermore, the information has to be interesting in order to attract attention on social networks (Czinkota & Ronkainen 2012: 554). Topics for discussion need to result in many opinions that can be given and messages should be aimed at group discussions. In order for the aspects identified

by Meyerson (2010) to contribute to an IMC strategy, they have to be linked to the overall branding strategy of an organisation.

Koekemoer (2004: 34) proposes a number of objectives for social media messages with an IMC perspective. The first objective of any brand message is to build primary demand. Meyerson (2010) focuses on the importance of adding a glimpse of what the brand stands for in each social media message. Koekemoer (2004: 34) posits that each message should aim to establish primary demand for the brand amongst their target audience. Therefore, the message should not only give a glimpse of what the brand stands for, but should communicate the core competency of the brand that makes the brand more desirable than its competitors. In addition, a brand message should attempt to reach a specific target audience (Holloman 2013). Thus, it is essential to create an experience of the brand to a wide number of audiences within a specific target group.

A further objective of brand messages is positioning. Effective brand messages communicated through social media can contribute to the overall positioning of the brand by providing relevant information (Meyerson 2010). Marketers can utilise social media to make the brand part of the lifestyle of the target audience. The brand message must attempt to win the hearts of their target market by positioning the brand in such a way that it will be the first choice of their target market (Koekemoer 2004: 36). Communication is essential to facilitate purchase and trial. The brand should communicate with the specific target market to assure them that they made the right choice by choosing this brand (Holloman 2013). The brand has to identify stumbling blocks that affect the target audience's choices (Koekemoer 2004: 36). The previous objectives are stepping stones to reach this final objective, namely to create loyal customers. It is important for the marketer to not only gain customers, but to keep them loyal to the brand as well (*ibid.*). This is one of the key principles of IMC. This consumer-based approach acknowledges the changes in the marketplace, and also takes into consideration the power of the consumer and the interactive nature of the marketing communication system.

The importance of a social media network site is to act as a platform for the company to engage in two-way communication with its stakeholder groups (Merril *et al.* 2011: 3). Interactive conversations with customers are important to a company as it provides feedback. All feedback is considered good, even if it is negative feedback. Negative feedback gives the organisation an idea of how to improve in terms of customers' satisfaction. Companies must have the patience and the determination to handle negative feedback with care. It is also important for companies to realise that a social media platform like Twitter never "sleeps" and that they have to be able to give feedback as soon as possible (Noff 2010: 6). A company can increase visitors' interest in the brand by frequently posting

competitions or special campaigns. This will not only have a positive impact on the customers, but will contribute to positive impressions on potential customers.

One IMC approach that is particularly relevant to social media is that of Schultz (2000). By applying the IMC approach of Schultz (2000: 25) one can determine if the brand messages are contributing to the promotion of a brand, or not. Schultz (2000) identifies five Rs that should be taken into consideration when planning the marketing communication strategy.

The first characteristic, namely *responsiveness*, is of cardinal importance in any IMC strategy. It entails that the marketer should always try to respond to the needs and wishes of the customer as quickly and effectively as possible (Schultz 2000: 25). The marketer needs to realise that the way the company responds to a customer will have an impact on the trust placed in the company. The company must play the role of the listener, instead of the speaker. When the customer or consumer feels that their voices are heard, they immediately have a positive attitude towards the company and brand (Schultz 2000: 26).

Secondly, the communication programmes should have *relevance* to the company's target group. The relevance is based on how well the communication programme addresses the needs and wants of the target group.

In the third place customers should be motivated to access the marketing communication themselves and not be interrupted by it (Schultz 2000: 25). The challenge in the marketplace is to be available or accessible to provide information when the customer or prospective customers ask for it, not only when the marketer wants to give them information. Schultz (2000) calls this characteristic *receptiveness* to the marketing communication programme. It is much more efficient to provide information when the buyer wants to buy and not only when the seller wants to sell (Schultz 2000: 25-26). This directly links to the statement made by Meyerson (2010: 7) that the long-term relationship between the client and the company can only be sustained when the company puts effort into engaging in two-way communication with its clients, rather than to fulfil its original purpose of selling products.

Another characteristic identified by Schultz (2000) is the *recognition* of the brand. The trustworthiness and knowledge of a brand is based on the familiarity of the brand in the marketplace; therefore, the communication programme should contain messages that support brand recognition. Consumers that know the brand from personal experience or from a recommendation of other people will easily make a choice between brands to use. It is important for the marketer to realise that the marketplace is competitive and that the brand itself can be the biggest asset of the company as the consumers want to identify with the characteristics of the brand (Schultz 2000: 26).

The final characteristic identified by Schultz (2000) is *relationships*. This characteristic reflects on the shared values between the buyers and the sellers. The organisation has to ensure that the relationships between their sellers and their customers are positive. The power is in the hands of the customer when it comes to the length, strength and depth of the relationship they have with the organisation (Schultz 2000: 26). The nature of the message does not always have to lead to certain actions. A better relationship can be formed when information sent out is useful to the target group, rather than to make them feel obligated to take a certain action (Hartley 2010: 14).

These different perspectives on effective IMC and online brand strategies provide the framework within which the data of this study was analysed. Table 1 aids in aligning thoughts on how IMC elements can contribute to an effective online presence of an organisation. In this table Schultz's (2000) 5R approach is used as the core elements that should be visible in Twitter messages. Then these elements are compared to the rules of online marketing, as compiled by Gamse (2012), in order to see how they can be applied to an online marketing strategy. The benefits attained from having a successful online marketing strategy, as stated by Leaning (2011), are added to give the marketer a perspective on the possible outcomes of having an effective online marketing strategy by using an IMC approach. Table 1 illustrates the criteria used to analyse the UFS Twitter messages.

TABLE 1: CRITERIA USED IN TWITTER MESSAGE ANALYSIS

IMC approach (Schultz)	Rules of effective online marketing strategy (Gamse)	Benefits of effective Twitter marketing strategy (Leaning)
Responsiveness	<i>Asking the audience can pay off.</i> It is essential for a company to encourage the visitors to engage in two-way communication.	Businesses can use the conversation with its visitors to monitor the replies or feedback. This will result in better management of its reputation.
Relevance	<i>Personify your visitors.</i> A company that plans its Twitter messages around the preferences of its typical followers can ensure that they have a positive experience of the brand's online presence.	Twitter users can be entertained or intrigued by promotions or events posted on Twitter without feeling that they are being lectured.
Receptivity	<i>Talk to the buyer behind the buyer.</i> A company's online presence should be based on nourishing the relationship with its clients rather than distributing clusters of unprocessed information.	Twitter enables businesses to <i>interact and communicate</i> with their followers to gain better insight into their thoughts about the brand and its products.

IMC approach (Schultz)	Rules of effective online marketing strategy (Gamse)	Benefits of effective Twitter marketing strategy (Leaning)
Recognition	<i>Portray a consistent image.</i> When the company is transparent, the potential client will have more confidence in trusting the brand. By using Twitter as a communication platform, the company can attempt to gain or uphold the trust of clients and potential clients.	Companies can develop and promote their brands by making use of the network site that enables millions of people to follow the brand.
Relationships	<i>Speak the language of your visitors.</i> The relationship between client and brand can develop to such an extent where the brand becomes part of the client's identity.	Frequent conversations with clients will ensure that a long-term relationship is built. By making use of Twitter as a cost-effective way of communication, the company can ensure that they become part of the client's life.

(Sources: Schultz 2000; Gamse 2012; Leaning 2011)

The previous discussion clearly illustrates that social media marketing has several benefits for organisations, and thus also universities, that optimise its usage. The point of departure for a social media message to promote the overall branding strategy should be that each message is rooted in the overall IMC strategy of the organisation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study a qualitative approach was followed. To ensure objectivity in this research a framework was set up in order to analyse each Twitter message (Merriam 2009: 14). This framework contained elements that contribute to an effective IMC strategy. As the Twitter messages of the UFS were analysed, findings were linked to its overall vision, mission and objectives. Each message was analysed according to the visibility of these elements and traits. Therefore, a specific timeframe was chosen to analyse the posts of the UFS Twitter page.

A case study strategy was used in this research as a certain phenomenon and its relation to its real life context (Yin 2003) was investigated. The relation between the Twitter posts and the way they fit into the IMC strategy of the UFS is unclear, therefore this type of strategy was ideal to use.

Tweets are created by the social media staff of the UFS and although they are given a structure in which they have to formulate messages, one cannot ignore the fact that their personality, their situation, and even their emotions have an influence on their posts. Nevertheless, studying the tweets of the institution can

spawn a broad spectrum of benefits that they can make use of in future. Institutions like universities engage in communication with stakeholders to improve or form relationships. By exploring if the Twitter messages contribute to the overall IMC strategy of the brand, one can determine if this communication platform enhances brand equity when it creates contact points with the brand.

Simons (2009: 15) emphasises that a well-formulated case study should be particularistic. This means that when studying the tweets of the UFS, the focus should only be on tweets within a specific timeframe. The ideal timeframe chosen for these messages were between 1 January 2013 and 31 July 2013. This timeframe included the tweets from the university's Twitter page before and after the first semester, and therefore an adequate number of tweets were gathered. The general benefits of the social media sites, as well as the specific branding elements of the UFS, were integrated to analyse specific tweets.

In analysing the data the tweets of the UFS (from the identified timeframe) were sorted in a chronological way by making use of a table created in Microsoft Excel. The first column of the table indicated the date of the tweet. The actual tweet was sorted in a column next to the date column. The third column was created for the purpose of analysing each of the individual tweets. Coding was used to analyse the messages of the social media sites. This type of analysis is used to examine qualitative data by assigning data units with a unique code (Saldaña 2013: 5). By means of open coding the tweets were analysed by placing them in a certain category according to the derived nature and purpose of the message.

To determine if the UFS's Twitter messages complement their overall branding strategy, documentation from the UFS website was reviewed to determine what brand characteristics had to be communicated in all brand messages in order to contribute to the IMC strategy. This institution states five core values which serve as the foundation for all activities, namely superior scholarship, human embrace, institutional distinctiveness, emergent leadership, and public service (University of the Free State 2013). These core values were also added to the analysis framework.

Finally, the specific UFS tweets were analysed through the process of open coding to identify categories. These categories included:

Administrative information: Information regarding any administrative arrangement that the current students of the university should take note of in order to complete certain tasks.

Celebrations – Academic: This category contains information regarding prestigious academic awards or achievements by current UFS students. This information is of value to current and prospective students, as well as their parents and the media.

Celebrations – Culture: The celebration of prestigious awards or achievements by current UFS students who participate in cultural activities are placed in this category.

Celebrations – Kovsie campuses: Information that relates to activities on the three campuses is placed in this category. By communicating this information any follower can gain insight into all the extramural activities that take place on the three campuses.

Celebrations – Kovsie culture: Information that celebrates activities that contributes to the overall culture of the institution. This information differs from the events held on campus in the Kovsie campuses category, based on the fact that it provides information about activities that are hosted annually and form part of the brand identity of the institution. In this category the focus is moved from communicating specific achievements attained at events to the actual events that are held.

Celebrations – Kovsie staff: Information that celebrates the professionalism and expertise of the Kovsie staff members are placed in this category. This information boosts the university's image and is communicated to both current and prospective students.

Celebrations – Sport: Prestigious sports awards or achievements obtained by current Kovsie students are placed in this category.

Celebrations – Student leadership: Information regarding any achievements and awards received by current students for innovation and leadership qualities.

Contemporary news: Information regarding any contemporary news of an external affair communicated on the UFS's Twitter page. This information is communicated to inform current students about external affairs.

Motivational: Quotes and motivational statements are communicated to current students in order to inspire them to achieve in a certain field.

Celebrity/Guest engagement: Information regarding any celebrities, academic professionals or external visitors who engaged in activities on campus.

Student interaction: Tweets in which the UFS aims to engage in two-way communication with its students is placed in this category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are reported in table format. Examples from the data of each category are presented in the first column. Then the appropriate elements from Schultz's (2000) 5R approach for an effective IMC strategy were identified and supported with the brand objectives of each message (Koekemoer 2004). In the final column, the core values of the UFS are aligned with the tweet categories to establish how the UFS incorporates its IMC strategy in online marketing.

Administrative information and academic celebrations

When looking at the administrative information category, it is clear that the UFS makes use of these messages to manage current students. These messages provide more information than necessary and therefore link directly to the *receptivity* characteristic of IMC (Schultz 2000). Other characteristics of IMC that are visible in these messages are *responsiveness*, *relevance* and *relationships* (*ibid.*). By providing current students with relevant information, the UFS responds to the students' needs. The UFS can assist its students with day-to-day activities and therefore the relationship between the students and the university could be influenced in a positive way. The main objective of providing administrative information on Twitter is to *provide relevant information to students* and to influence their *attitudes and feelings* towards the brand (Koekemoer 2004). By providing students with more information than what is expected, the UFS aims to be seen as an institution that goes the extra mile for its students in order to make the students' day-to-day activities easier. The core value of institutional distinctiveness is communicated. Table 2 provides an example of this type of message.

TABLE 2: ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION AND ACADEMIC CELEBRATIONS CATEGORIES

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Administrative information	01/06/2013: Cut-off date for 1st year applications to study Architecture at the #UFS extended to 28 June. For more info: http://apps.ufs.ac.za/dl/yearbooks/190_yearbook_eng.pdf ...	Receptivity Relationship Responsiveness Relevance	- To provide relevant information - To influence attitudes and feelings	Institutional distinctiveness

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Celebrations: Academic	15/04/2013: Very proud of our 3 322 graduates receiving their degrees this week. Live streaming of graduation here: http://www.ufs.ac.za/ufslivestreaming/ ... #UFs #Kovsies	Receptivity Relationship Relevance	- To create brand preferences and awareness - To influence attitudes and feelings - To build primary demand	Superior scholarship

In the category dedicated to celebrations in the academic field (see table 2), the receptivity, relationship and relevance characteristics of Schultz’s (2000) IMC strategy can be identified. By providing students with information about academic awards and prestigious heights achieved by students in the academic field, the institution provides information that is not only relevant and interesting, but also motivates current students. These messages can also be used to persuade potential students and their parents to choose the UFS as their tertiary institution of choice. Information placed in this category aims to build a relationship with the target audience by not only giving credit to those who worked hard, but also to create a positive brand association. The main objectives that can be reached through these messages are to create a brand preference, to influence the brand attitudes and feelings, and to build a primary demand of the UFS as an institution (Koekemoer 2004). The core value of the UFS that is communicated via these messages is superior scholarship because the university celebrates the academic achievements attained by its current students and staff members.

Kovsie culture, campus, cultural activities, sport and staff

Although the messages in the categories differ where the Kovsie culture, campus, cultural, sports and staff activities are celebrated, the objectives they reach as well as the IMC approaches they convey are similar. With these types of messages the receptivity, relevance and relationship characteristics of Schultz’s (2000) IMC strategy can be identified. The information communicated in the different categories is based on a receptive approach as they are tweeted to students and potential students as extra information. The students and potential students have a desire to be informed of different activities on campus. Not only is the information of the different categories relevant to the target audience, it also reinforces the entire brand image. By providing the information, the relationship and brand associations that these groups form with regard to the brand will be promoted. Therefore, the main brand objectives reached through these messages are the

ability to create brand preferences, to influence the brand attitudes and feelings, and also to build primary demand (Koekemoer 2004). The core value conveyed through these messages once again is the value of the UFS reaching the status of institutional distinctiveness. In the category where UFS staff members' activities are celebrated, the value of academic excellence is conveyed, for these messages primarily consist of the academic achievements by staff members. Table 3 presents a message in the Koviesie staff member category.

TABLE 3: CELEBRATIONS: KOVSIE STAFF CATEGORY

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Celebrations: Koviesie Staff	30/05/2013: 2 #UFS professors received research grants from the NRF to buy equipment to add more value to their research. http://ow.ly/lxLgE	Receptivity Relevance Recognition	- To create brand preferences and awareness - To influence attitudes and feelings	- Superior scholarship - Institutional distinctiveness

Celebrity and guest engagement

In the celebrity and guest engagement category, the relevancy and receptivity characteristics of Schultz's (2000) IMC strategy could be identified. The information posted in this category is vital to current students of the university, but also to potential students and their parents. Whenever students come across these messages, they should create a feeling of pride amongst students when they see that their tertiary institution is associated with celebrities and other popular individuals. These messages also positively influence the brand perception they have of the UFS because they are able to see that the UFS is associated with esteemed international academic personnel or celebrities. The main objectives are to create brand awareness, but also to influence the target audience's attitudes and feelings towards the brand (Koekemoer 2004). The core value of the university that is communicated through these messages is that the UFS can be seen as an institution of distinctiveness for it associates itself with celebrities and other important people. Table 4 illustrates how a message from this category was analysed.

TABLE 4: CELEBRITY GUEST ENGAGEMENT CATEGORY

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Celebrity / Guest engagement	23/04/2013: Prof. Deevia Bhana presenting explosive data presenting her research on “Moffies, gays and isitabane” at #UFScolloquium.	Relevance Receptivity Relationships	- To create brand preferences and awareness - To influence attitudes and feelings	Institutional distinctiveness

Student leadership and contemporary news

When looking at the categories for student leadership messages, one will recognise the receptivity, relationship and relevance characteristics of Schultz’s (2000) IMC strategy. By providing students and prospective students with information on achievements attained by students for their leadership qualities, the UFS could build relationships with the different parties of the target audience. The information does not only give credit to the students who achieved, but it is also proof that the UFS supports their students to become the leaders of tomorrow. The brand objectives that can be identified in these messages are to build primary demand of the institution and to influence the attitudes and feelings of the target audience towards the brand (Koekemoer 2004). The core values of the UFS communicated via these messages are the ability to support emergent leaders and to embrace humanity. Table 5 provides an example of this category.

TABLE 5: STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND CONTEMPORARY NEWS CATEGORIES

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Celebrations: Student Leadership	04/05/2013: William Clayton, @UFS_SRC president, welcomes prospective students to his home: #UFS #UFSOpenDay	Receptivity Relationship Relevance	- To create brand preferences and awareness - To build primary demand - To influence attitudes and feelings	- Emergent leadership - Human embrace

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Contemporary news	25/06/2013: Our hearts go out to Nelson Mandela and his family. http://ow.ly/i/2rz23	Responsive Relevance Receptivity	- To influence attitudes and feelings	- Public service - Human embrace

In table 5, the role of the contemporary news category is illustrated. The purpose of this category is to provide information about topical issues that are discussed in international and national news. The IMC characteristics of Schultz (2000) that are visible in this category are responsiveness, relevance and receptivity. Students need to be made aware of contemporary issues in the news. With the UFS being a tertiary institution, it is essential to provide students with this information. Although it has no direct effect on the promotion of the brand, it does influence the relationship the current and prospective students have with the institution. The target audience will see the institution as a credible source of information. The brand objective reached through these messages is to influence the attitudes and feelings of the target audience with regard to the brand. The core value of the UFS that is conveyed through these messages is that the UFS contributes to public service by being involved in contemporary issues, and also to embrace humanity. The UFS may not be directly involved in public service when communicating these messages but it does alert students to issues that are seen as of national or international importance.

Motivation and student engagement

The final two categories, namely motivation and student engagement, can be seen as the most effective categories within the context of this study. These categories contain all the approaches of Schultz's (2000) IMC strategy. These messages generate responses from the target audience and therefore have the potential to influence relationships with the brand in a positive way. The messages are relevant specifically to current students because the messages are aimed at certain activities and challenges that the students face on a daily basis. With these messages the students experience the character of the UFS brand on a more personal level; therefore, the messages are a form of brand recognition. The main objectives achieved through these messages are to influence the attitudes and feelings of the target audience, but also to build a primary demand of the UFS brand (Koekemoer 2004). The UFS core values that are conveyed through these messages are the ability to embrace humanity as the university takes the issues of its students to heart. By reaching out to their students, this institution also lives out the core value of becoming an institution of distinctiveness. Table 6 illustrates the findings from the analysis made from these two categories.

TABLE 6: MOTIVATION AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CATEGORIES

Category	Examples from data	IMC approach characteristics	Brand objective	UFS core value
Motivational	25/06/2013: "I'm not responsible for the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life, but I'm responsible for what I do with the life I've got." H. Hesse.	Responsive Relevance Receptivity Recognition Relationship	- To influence attitudes and feelings	- Human embrace - Institutional distinctiveness
Student engagement	22/02/2013: What is the highlight of your day? / Wat is die hoogtepunt van jou dag? #kovsies #UFS	Responsive Relevance Receptivity Recognition Relationship	- To influence attitudes and feelings - To build primary demand	Human embrace

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to explore the role and nature of social media messages in the context of promoting a brand. Linking all online branding strategies to the brand's overall IMC strategy is one of the most fundamental steps in the planning process of an online branding strategy. Not only does an effective social media site enable an organisation to give and receive immediate feedback, it can also be considered as one of the media to communicate strong brand values on a global basis. To utilise this media channel to its full potential, a steadfast IMC strategy needs to serve as the foundation.

When looking at the case of the specific university's Twitter page, it is clear how the UFS sustained its position as a top university in South Africa. It incorporates its IMC strategy by ensuring that the institution's core values are identified in each message that is tweeted. From the findings it follows that the UFS takes most pride in communicating that it is an institution of distinctiveness. This reflects on the brand objectives reached by these messages as the university's main objective for its Twitter messages is to influence the attitudes and feelings of the target audience. This institution believes that it can be seen as one of the top universities in South Africa, and it is directly reflected in all its messages, especially online, which aim to evoke similar pride in its staff and students.

Recommendations that can be made from this study include that organisations should use social media as a "welcoming mat" to lure a wide audience to visit the website or actual premises of the organisation. There is nothing that welcomes the target market to a brand like strong core values that are visible in all brand messages. Without making the core values of an organisation visible in social media

messages, the brand will not succeed in engaging in two-way communication or in building relationships with the target audience. The suggested framework can be used to analyse all social media messages of an organisation, or to create successful social media messages. This framework will require IMC characteristics to be explored within the messages. These characteristics should then be aligned with brand objectives before the messages can be formulated by making use of the core values of the organisation.

Social media might have taken the marketing world by storm, but it need not pose a threat to a company. With meticulous planning and by aligning all online marketing strategies to a solid IMC strategy, the company can succeed in building a strong online presence that contributes to the promotion of the brand. An effective IMC strategy is key to weather the social media storm with absolute composure. IMC is truly the eye of the social media storm.

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